

ADVENTURE STORIES No. 32

Editor : F. M. NAYLOR

THE HIGH CLIFF MYSTERY

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CHAPTER I

PLANE IN THE NIGHT

“**H**ERE we are! Hurrah for Red House and the Professor, not forgetting Adam!”

The station taxi had not quite stopped before Jack Davis and Peter Bradley, with their sisters close on their heels, had tumbled out to greet the elderly gentleman who stood on the steps of the house to receive them. Jack, always exuberant, topped his verbal enthusiasm by throwing his cap in the air and catching it again. Peter smiled. His greeting of his uncle was more restrained but none the less sincere.

It was a year since the four friends had spent their summer holiday with elderly Professor John Bradley, celebrated Egyptologist, and encountered an exciting adventure which had left all four children with a feeling of “more to follow.” Hence their pleas to be allowed to return to Red House for this summer’s holiday too.

"I *am* glad to see you all," the Professor said emphatically. He too was as excited as a schoolboy as he led the way indoors. "I am afraid, however, I cannot promise you any thrills this time, but the sea and the sands are still here and I daresay you will find plenty of interesting things to do," he added with a twinkle in his mild blue eyes.

"Go down to the boat-house. There you will see something very wonderful!"

Adam, the misshapen dwarf-like little man who, years ago, had owed his life to Professor Bradley and had adored the old gentleman with a dog-like devotion from that day onwards, could not hold back his news a second longer.

"The Professor, he think you like to have boat," he rushed on. "He buy one for you all. But you take Adam. We catch fish for tea."

"That's the spirit, Adam," Peter said enthusiastically. "I like fish, and I like fishing—if the sea isn't too rough! We'll see what can be done."

"There will be plenty of time for that sort of thing in the morning," the Professor said briskly. "But it is almost dusk, and you have had a long journey. I suggest a walk along the beach, a good supper and early to bed. Then you will be able to rise in the morning and have a long and busy day."

"Just as you say, sir," Peter and Jack agreed and the two girls, Ann and Carol, nodded too. "We'll go for a stroll now and come back in about half an hour or an hour. We're all rather tired. But we must pop along to the kitchen first and have a word with Franks before we go."

Franks, the Professor's servant and handyman, looked up with a smile as the four, followed by the faithful Adam, trooped into his immaculate kitchen.

"Glad to see you all again," he responded to their

greeting by waving a long knife in the direction of the cooking stove. "The Professor said he would like you to have a special treat on your first day of the holidays, so I am doing my best. There are two fat chickens in the oven, and all the trimmings. Then there will be cherry tart and cream to follow. Is that special enough, do you think?"

"I should think so!" Jack's eyes sparkled at the very thought of so much good food, although he was by no means a greedy boy.

"You promised to give me a few hints this holiday," Carol reminded Franks. "Don't forget! I still intend to be a domestic science mistress when I leave school."

"You're likely to poison most of your friends off before then," Ann teased. "Be sure you make her remember the ingredients, Franks! I've eaten some awful concoctions of hers this last term! Even friendship won't stand much more."

"All right, all right, be off with you now, the lot of you!" Franks was laughing as he pretended to chase them from the kitchen. "I'll never have anything ready in time if I listen to you much longer! And don't stay out late or everything will be spoiled. An overcooked meal is just as bad as an undercooked one," he reminded them.

"He's a good chap," Peter remarked as the friends and Adam made their way to the beach. "Beats me how he can fight, swim, run and everything else and yet be a good cook. It doesn't seem natural, somehow."

"And why not? Most of the leading chefs in all parts of the world are men," Jack said. "A chap needn't starve if he knows how to take care of himself. I don't intend to grow up to be the sort of man who can't even boil himself an egg or make himself a cup of tea. I believe in being independent."

"In that case you had better take a few lessons from Franks along with your sister," Peter teased. "Remember those beans you cooked when we went to the school camp at Easter? They were more like black marbles than beans when *you'd* finished with them."

"I didn't burn the bacon, anyhow," Jack retorted, and the matter ended in a friendly scuffle and exchange which lasted until the small party reached the foot of the cliffs.

"Way up there," Peter flung an arm dramatically in the direction of the higher cliffs, "you, Adam, coshed me on the head with a stone, exactly one year ago. Remember our introduction?"

"To warn you, yes," the misshapen little man said anxiously. "Adam not intend to hurt you."

"But you did that too," Peter was beginning to tease when Ann broke in on the conversation.

"There's someone in trouble there now," she said quickly. "Look, a little old lady, down on the beach. She's staring up at the cliff and running backwards and forwards. Someone belonging to her must have started to climb and got stuck half-way up the cliff."

"Your eyesight is better than mine," Carol looked to where Ann was pointing. "I can see the old lady all right, but not anyone on the cliff."

"I can't either," Ann said impatiently. "I meant that's what must have happened from the way she's behaving. Come along, everybody. What are we waiting for?"

Without further words the party set off at a run. Jack was the running champion for Middle School, but he was left behind as Adam's peculiar loping gait took him well to the fore. They arrived, panting and breathless, to find an agitated, frail old lady who was plainly afraid of the ugly little man who had dashed forward to help her. Her expression was relieved and she appeared reassured as the

children came to a halt, Peter's hand on Adam's shoulder, as though to prove without words he was a dear and trusted friend of the small party.

"Her cat," Adam said briefly in his quaint English. "It fast up there. Little cat. Boys chased it. Now cat cannot get down."

"Where is he?" Jack demanded. "I can't see him."

"He is hiding in that tuft of rock samphire," the old lady pointed with one trembling hand. "There . . . do you see those greenish white flowers?"

"I see him. Adam go."

Before anyone could say a word to prevent him, the little man was scaling the cliffs, hands and feet acting like claws as he began the upward scramble.

"Let him go." Jack laid a hand on Peter's arm as his friend was about to follow. "He can beat either of us at this game. Remember we used to call him Monkey Glands because he could climb so well. He'll be all right, so long as the kitten doesn't panic and rush any farther."

In the gathering dusk the four children and the old lady stood in silence, watching the peculiar figure of Adam as he climbed higher and higher up the almost sheer face of the cliff. They sensed but could neither hear nor see the movement of the frightened little kitten as Adam drew nearer.

"It thinks the boys who chased it are catching up with it," Ann breathed. "If only it could understand . . ."

"Adam's talking to the kitten," Carol said. "Listen."

Faintly they caught the sound of Adam's voice. They could not tell what he was saying but the tone suggested he was murmuring words of encouragement to the tiny creature, perhaps telling it not to be afraid, this was a friend coming to help, not to persecute. Even from a

distance Adam's peculiar voice sounded reassuring and confident, if only the kitten could understand.

"I have 'im!"

Adam's triumphant shout came down to them, clearly sounding in the still air, startling them out of their tense, listening attitudes. Involuntarily they all breathed a sigh of relief.

"It'll be worse coming down than it was going up," Peter said.

"Oh, dear!" The exclamation came from the old lady. "I do hope he'll be careful of Tinker . . ."

"Adam won't hurt the kitten," Peter said quickly as though in reproof. "He'd damage himself first!"

"I didn't mean to suggest——" began the old lady nervously, when Jack ran forward, shouting.

"Here he is, safe and sound. And the kitten, too. Let's have a look at him, Adam."

Adam, grinning and so looking more like an ape than ever, handed over the little shivering bundle of fur which mewed piteously. Jack, sensing the anxiety of the old lady who hovered anxiously beside him, gave the tiny creature a gentle caress, then turned to put it into the trembling old hands which were already held out to him.

"Tinker!" The little old lady put her wrinkled face down on to the soft, black fur, tears rolling down her cheeks. "You naughty one," she scolded softly. "You must never run away again!"

"Well, ma'am," Peter spoke for all of them, since Adam was obviously embarrassed and longing to leave, "we'll be on our way back to Red House. Unless, of course, we could escort you home? It's rather dark now."

"I don't live far away from here, but if you'd care to come along I would like to make you all a cup of tea and let you see the rest of my little cat family," the old lady

said shyly. "My name is Miss Lavender, and I live in Sea-View, the cottage round the other side of the bay. But of course, if you'd rather not . . ."

She broke off as though fearful of intruding her shy personality on them all, but Carol and Ann spoke together, realizing instinctively Miss Lavender would feel hurt if they refused her invitation.

"Have you other cats?" Ann asked with interest. "I—we—would love to see them, if we wouldn't be too big a crowd for you."

"I know Sea-View," Carol said at the same time. "It's a lovely little house. I've often admired it from outside, and you have such a beautiful garden, too."

It was settled without either the boys or Adam having anything to do with the matter. The girls seemed to have accepted Miss Lavender as a friend and her shy smile told how pleased she was to have her hospitality accepted. In two minutes they were all walking back, Miss Lavender the centre of the little group, carrying Tinker carefully in her arms.

Sea-View cottage *was* a lovely little house. Carol and Ann exclaimed enthusiastically over the pretty garden which Miss Lavender had about the house and which was not visible in this light, save the vague and indefinite shapes of flowers and bushes, but smelled delightfully as they followed their hostess up the narrow flagged path.

"That's night-scented stock," Miss Lavender explained in her thin, light voice. "I always plant a border of it because of the sweet perfume."

They were inside the cottage by this time. A moment later Miss Lavender had switched on the light and at once the children and Adam became aware of the cats. There seemed to be dozens of them, but Miss Lavender explained there were "only ten."

"I have some others," she said shyly, bending to pick up a beautiful white cat, "but they have a little house of their own at the bottom of the garden."

"Whatever do you do with them all?" Carol asked, already, with Ann, down on her knees on the soft, woollen rugs. "They're lovely."

"I think so," Miss Lavender said gently. "As to what I do with them, I just keep them, of course. It's rather a problem about the kittens, though. I *never* drown them. But sometimes it's such a trouble to find good homes for them all. And I hate to think of their going where people don't care what happens to a cat once they've got it."

"Why don't you send them to Fairwater, Miss Lavender?" Jack asked. "When we were here last year we went to Fairwater one day and there's a lovely pet shop in the High Street. I bet they'd be glad to find someone who'd let them have kittens to sell."

"Sell?" Miss Lavender looked surprised. "Do you mean people would pay money for them?" she asked in astonishment.

"Of course," Peter tried to explain. "I know some cats are very valuable," he went on. "It's a matter of pedigree. I once read about it in a paper!"

"All my cats are well-bred," Miss Lavender said in a dignified tone. "Lulu here," she picked up a very haughty looking Siamese cat and stroked it gently, "has quite a family tree."

"Then I should try Jack's suggestion," Peter said firmly. "It must cost an awful lot of money to feed them all," he added. "And they all look sleek, flourishing and very well-fed."

"I try to look after them well," Miss Lavender told them. "I've no one else to love and care for, you see. They are my little family."

Her words were not a plea for sympathy, but it struck the four children and Adam that she must be a very lonely person. It was Adam, however, who found the right thing to say.

"We love the cats," he said, speaking carefully so that his words would not confuse Miss Lavender. "We all love cats. If you let us, we come help feed and care for them. When children go, Adam come by self, if you let him. Adam love to help. Adam love all small animals. All things which need love and care."

"How kind of you," said Miss Lavender who had been more than a little afraid of Adam until she saw how gently he handled the kitten. She turned to him now with a delightful smile. "I would love you to come, all of you," she said quickly, "but oh, dear me, how long it is taking me to prepare that cup of tea!"

"Let me help." Jack scrambled to his feet, anxious to prove to his friends he had been sincere when he told them he did not intend to grow up dependent on others for his creature comforts.

"We'll all help," Carol suggested, and as there was general agreement the little house soon became a hive of activity. In a very short time the brown teapot was full of hot, strong tea, far stronger than the Professor would have allowed them to drink at so late an hour, but he was not there to remonstrate! There were scones and cakes on the trolley, a plate of biscuits, and then Miss Lavender added the final touch by placing a huge dish of milk on the floor for the cats.

"It isn't very splendid," said Miss Lavender with a sigh. "I would have liked to give you a really wonderful treat for saving Tinker's life. However, perhaps some other time, when I am prepared for you all coming to see me I shall be able to do better."

"This is grand," Jack said heartily, and the others agreed.

They made a merry group, learning much about Miss Lavender and her pets as they talked. Even the fact that Miss Lavender had once been a matron in a large school did nothing to mar their new friendship. It was impossible to imagine her as anything else but sweet and gentle, considerate of others.

"I expect you were a good friend to everyone and that all the pupils knew to whom they could turn if they were in trouble!" Jack said cheekily.

It was late when the party left Sea-View and quite dark by the time they reached the drive leading to the Red House. Talking and laughing together they trudged on, thinking now of the comfortable beds awaiting them. Suddenly an aeroplane zoomed overhead, sweeping low down over the cliffs and heading out over the sea.

"Gosh!" Peter half turned with the others. "Night exercises, I suppose. I didn't know there was an R.A.F. station anywhere near here, though."

"Not R.A.F. plane," Adam said slowly. "See him every evening. He belong one man, Adam think."

"Must be a chap with a lot of money, then," Peter remarked. "Takes an awful lot of cash to run a private aeroplane, or so I've heard."

"That's another thing I want when I'm grown-up," Jack said, causing an outburst of laughter. "You can all laugh," he added defiantly. "It's the folks who know what they want when they're young and who are prepared to work for it, who get what they want when they are old. I'm prepared to work for what I want, so I feel sure, with ordinary luck, one day I'll succeed."

"It sounds a bit complicated," Peter commented. "Come along, you lot, there's Uncle at the door. It must

be later than we thought if he's getting worried about us."

The Professor *had* been a little anxious, although as he confessed once they were safely indoors, with Adam to accompany them he was not quite so worried as he might have been. It was Franks who had been most greatly disturbed, his carefully planned meal being ruined. "Except for the huge amount *I* ate!" the Professor twinkled.

Apologies were made to Franks without further delay, and once the friends had made their peace with him, they found the Professor very interested to hear about Miss Lavender and of Adam's rescue of her kitten.

"Adam's a wonderful person," the Professor remarked gently. "He is as good as a watch-dog and as resourceful and as strong as two ordinary men. And yet, with the weak and helpless, he is as gentle as a lamb."

Peter mentioned Jack's suggestion that Miss Lavender should sell her kittens, and the Professor nodded his approval.

"Very sensible," he remarked, puffing away at his pipe, an innovation at which the children stared in amazement. The Professor caught their exchanged glances of astonishment and smiled. "Yes," he said quietly, "I have changed since your last visit. I am no longer the old recluse wrapped up in what Jack was pleased to call 'mummies and things.' I smoke, I play golf, oh yes, I do," he insisted as they openly showed their surprise. "I've been out and about during the winter, lecturing. I think you will find life here more to your liking this year than when you first came to an old man who was so absent-minded he often forgot to open the daily paper or to read his letters."

The children joined in his laughter and openly commented on the facts they had already noticed. For one

thing the house and garden looked different. The one had been newly decorated and the other newly planted. In addition the Professor himself no longer trudged about the house in a worn out gown and slippers. He was neatly garbed in a light grey suit, wore brown brogue shoes and had, apparently, grown to take an interest in himself, his surroundings and in the world at large. A year ago he had thought of little else but of what happened in Egypt thousands of years ago.

"Changes all the way round," the Professor agreed, still smiling. "Sea-View, where you have been this evening, was not occupied when you were here last summer. And at Christmas we had other new neighbours. You remember High Cliff House, the huge one on top of the highest cliff? It is occupied now for the first time since I came to live here, fifteen years ago. I thought it would remain vacant until it fell into ruins."

"That gloomy-looking old barracks, do you mean, sir?" Jack's questions were always asked before he had time to consider their wording. "Who on earth would want to live in a place like that?"

"I understand the man who has bought the place is a writer of scientific papers," the Professor said slowly. "At present he is said to be working on some kind of invention. He has two or more man-servants, and when Franks met one of them at the store when ordering our groceries, the man made it plain his master wished to be left quite alone. Naturally we have not intruded."

"Unsociable blighter!" Jack commented. "I should let him stew in his own juice."

"Since that is his evident desire," the Professor remarked with twinkling eyes, "I should say it is best for all concerned. And now, I am sure it is long past your usual bedtime. I am sorry you missed your special dinner,

but we will try and make up for that to-morrow. A good deed is well worth a missed meal. Now, if you want to be up early in the morning I think you had better go to bed!"

He paused for a moment, rising to his feet, then added: "By the way, a local fisherman, Bill Stockton, promised to take you out on your first trip in the boat. I should advise you all to listen well to what he has to say. He's lived here, man and boy, and knows all the currents and so on around this part of the coast. He will prove a good friend, I am certain."

With many expressions of thanks and satisfaction, the four children trooped off to bed. The holidays had started well. Their own boat awaited them, Miss Lavender had made them welcome at her cottage, and one way and another they appeared to be heading for six weeks of fun. Jack was just switching off the light beside his bed when Peter, from the twin bed on the opposite side of the room, lifted himself on one elbow.

"Listen," he said sharply. "What's that?"

Jack listened obediently, than laughed and pressed the switch, plunging the room into darkness.

"That bloke with the private plane," he said easily. "Must be a crazy sort of coot to go stunting around during the night." He gave a huge yawn. "Anyhow, it's no business of ours, old man. Happy Dreams!"

Then he turned over and in a few minutes both boys were sound asleep.



CHAPTER II

THE LEGEND OF THE GHOST-BOAT

THE four children were awakened early by Adam, an odd-looking figure as he came quietly into their respective rooms carefully carrying a tray with cups of tea and biscuits.

"Franks he say this silly," he explained to Peter and Jack, "but Adam like to do this for you all. The girls, they are up," he added.

"We can't let Carol and Ann beat us!" Peter thanked Adam for his kindly thought and swung out of bed. "Hustle, Jack!" he admonished his chum. "I'm ready to eat a huge breakfast and then we *must* get down to the beach and see this boat. I think it's swell of Uncle John to have bought it for us."

"He's changed so much since last year," Jack retorted laughingly. "I have a feeling we can expect almost anything."

The Professor was already in the dining room as the boys joined Ann, Carol and their host. Remembering how, a year ago, he had found it necessary to remind his uncle to eat at all, Peter stared in astonishment as he watched the Professor eating a hearty meal. The old man caught his glance and laughed.

"No necessity to remind me to eat now, Peter," he laughed again. "Or to read my letters. You children certainly woke me up when you last visited me. I am getting quite stout because I always remember to eat these days, and certainly since I have gone about more I have found many new interests."

There certainly *was* a change in the Professor, Peter thought as he watched his uncle slit the flaps of the envelopes of his somewhat formidable pile of correspondence. Now, although he was reading the letters carefully, making notes on some of them, screwing others up preparatory to destroying them, he went on steadily eating. He looked up suddenly, his pale blue eyes alight with excitement.

"Listen to this, children," he ordered. "This is the kind of thing which makes my life interesting these days. I have discovered that many people are very interested in what I have proved about the ancient civilization of Egypt, and I have, as I have already mentioned to you, been lecturing up and down the country during the past winter months. Now comes this letter."

He cleared his throat and began to read aloud to them.

"Dear Sir," read the Professor, "I heard your lecture in Littleminster some time ago and was so interested that I at once obtained books and began to study for myself. Then I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of hearing you again at Beddleton, and now I find myself with an unexpected vacation of three weeks from my

duties with my firm and am wondering if I dare approach you with a suggestion? Would you be kind enough to spare me even a little of your time during those three weeks? What I am trying to ask is, would you consider me a private student of Egyptology, if you can possibly forgive my presumption in attempting to encroach upon you in this way? Naturally I would be prepared to pay for the privilege . . .

"And so on and so on," concluded the Professor, folding up the letter and replacing it in its envelope. "It is at times like this I realize how foolish I have been in the past," he went on regretfully. "It is one thing to devote oneself to research, to learning of matters outside one's usual circle of comprehension, and quite another to be made to remember there may be many would-be students mentally starving; starving for even a little of the knowledge one has gained."

"Your friend would find it hard to starve in the desert, wouldn't he, sir?" Jack asked quietly.

A puzzled frown creased the old gentleman's forehead as he brought all his attention to bear on what he evidently took to be a serious question.

"I am afraid I do not understand you, my boy," he said gravely. "Admittedly there is a far greater possibility of a man being driven mad and subsequently dying from thirst while in the desert, but I fail to see how you can substantiate your statement that it would be—what did you say?—hard to starve in the desert."

"I should think it would," Jack smiled at the others. "Because of all the sand which is there, sir."

The others began to laugh, but at first the Professor continued to look puzzled, evidently turning Jack's words over in his mind. Suddenly he too began to smile.

"I see," he nodded his head. "The sand which is

there . . . the sandwiches there! Of course! How stupid of me to forget that Jack likes to tease us all. I'm not so changed as I thought I was, after all."

He looked so crestfallen that Jack hastened to make amends, knowing that the Professor *had* greatly changed from the absent-minded old scholar to a man more conscious of the rest of the world. Aloud he said:

"And this student, or would-be student, sir. What do you intend to do about him?"

"Well," the Professor beamed round the table, his pleasure fully restored, "I don't think it would interfere very much with you four if I told him he may stay at Red House for the next three weeks, if he so desires. I can teach him a great deal in that time, I think. He has, evidently, the desire to learn, which is half the battle, and it will be a pleasure to me to have someone evidently youthful who is so keenly interested in the subject so dear to myself. Egyptology, however, interests such a vastly different number of people, I wonder exactly what sort of a person he is? I should not want anyone here who would spoil your holidays for you, no matter who he may be."

"He won't bother us, Uncle John," Peter hastened to assure the old gentleman. "The only thing is," he hesitated a moment then hurried on at the Professor's questioning glance, "will it be too much for you? I mean, you have the four of us here for the hols. You have your work. You told us you were writing a book as well as preparing a series of lectures ready for next winter. You look so much better than you did when we were here last year I'd hate you to overwork and make yourself into a walking skeleton again," he ended anxiously.

"I promise not to do that!" The Professor laughed, but they all saw he was touched by his nephew's concern. "I don't forget to take care of myself these days, Peter. You

ask Franks! And, as I say, I feel it would be pleasant to have such a person here. With all due respect to you four, none of you can honestly say you are *really* interested in my work, can you?"

"Only when it becomes an adventure," Jack said solemnly.

"But we'd all like to go with you next time you go to Egypt, Uncle John," Ann said swiftly. "We'd like to have the thrill of watching you discover things. That part of your work *must* be exciting. We all realize discovery itself is only a part of the whole. It's all this studying that makes us feel . . ."

"I know," the Professor laughed as he rose to his feet. "I quite understand, and I don't really blame you," he added. "I know studying is not so attractive to everyone as it is to me, but although you may not believe me," his eyes twinkled as he spoke, "I once hated studying just as much as you all do, or *say* you do! As the years go by you may change your minds, as I did. As to coming with me on a trip sometime, you must read a little of my notes first, then you will understand that sometimes it takes months of patient hard work before one has anything at all to report."

"I just can't fathom how he does it!" Jack looked after the Professor's frail figure as the old gentleman left the room. "He works late hours at night, most of the day and always looks as fresh as a daisy, as the saying is. It must be that he's so keen on his job he doesn't realize how many hours he puts in or how hard he works. Every man to his own job, I suppose. Hurry up, you slackers!" he urged. "We want a picnic basket from Franks, then let's get down to the beach and the boat-house as fast as we can. It's going to be time to come back before you have all finished breakfast!"

They trooped along to the kitchen to find to their delight there was no necessity to wait until Franks packed a basket. Adam, a grin on his face, waved dramatically to the already-packed food and triumphantly announced that he had come along early to help Franks. He had also been to Sea-View and fetched the milk from the farm for Miss Lavender's cat family. He was able to report that Miss Lavender was going to telephone the pet shop in Fairwater and attempt to arrange a sale for her kittens.

"Then all *we* have to do is to go down to the boat-house and find Bill Stockton," Peter said gleefully. "Thanks for all you've done, Adam. Let's go."

Bill Stockton did not require finding. He was sitting outside the boat-house smoking his pipe and staring out to sea. He was a weather-beaten, white whiskered individual, with twinkling bright blue eyes and the typical rolling gait of a man who had spent more time afloat than on shore.

"Morning, young folks," he greeted them as they advanced. "Fine day for a sail. Going to try the *Adventurer*?"

"Is that the boat's name?" Ann asked, running forward. "I like the sound of it. Was it named when Uncle bought it, I wonder. Where is it, Mr. Stockton?"

"*She*," Bill gave Ann a formidable frown, "is in the boat-house. Aye, she's named the *Adventurer*. The Professor named her, I understand. And she's a trim little craft."

Feeling very excited, the four friends, Adam in the rear, followed the old man into the boat-house. Once inside their excitement rose to fever pitch. The *Adventurer* looked all Bill had said, a trim little craft, her name painted in scarlet letters across the bows. She had an outboard

engine of three-and-a-half horse power, and contained as well a pair of oars and a boat-hook.

"Let's push her out." Bill spoke through clouds of smoke as he puffed away at his pipe. "I'll show you how to start her, give you a turn round both bays, and then you should be all right. Professor Bradley says you are all sensible young folks, but the best of people 'appen accidents if they don't take care. Remember that."

The *Adventurer* was started by means of a piece of cord wound tightly round the fly-wheel and then jerked away with a sharp pull.

"How fast will she go?" Jack asked, speed being the most wonderful thing in the world so far as he was concerned.

"'Bout one-and-a-half knots," Bill said. "Fast enough for you lot, if you asks me!"

The boys made no comment, but each knew the other was wondering if it would be possible to coax a little more speed from the engine, and each knew they would try, the very first opportunity.

"I'll take you round Open Bay," Bill said firmly. "That's far enough for folks your age an' size. There's an eddy in Nether Bay might well spell finish to 'ee, if so be as you went round past the headland and up under High Cliff."

"Can one sail into Nether Bay without passing the Twin Fangs, Mr. Stockton?" Ann asked with a glance over her shoulder at the two large, tapering mounds of rock which rose out of the sea and appeared to guard the entrance to Nether Bay, the small stretch of water almost enclosed by the encircling headland. "When we climbed High Cliff last year we could see the water whirling round in that little bay. It's fascinating."

"'Tis dangerous," Bill said shortly. "Ye can sail into

the bay, o' course, but getting out again's another matter. Nether Bay's a whirlpool, that's what. Now let you stick to Open Bay and be satisfied with your boat an' the fishing ye can do from it. Don't want to have no call to be fetching out Sam Saunders and John Briggson from the Coastguard's hut, or to be a-fixing of the rocket for the lifeboat."

Not one of the children commented. The boys watched Bill's every movement, and all of them listened to his words in order not to miss a point he had to make regarding tides and currents. Bill knew every inch of the local coast-line, or so he boasted, and they were willing to profit from his knowledge, but they were not so willing to promise not to sail where and how they pleased.

By the time their first lesson was ended the children were satisfied they could manage the *Adventurer* for themselves, and when Bill had consented to give them a few tips on fishing, information which Adam scorned since he avowed he knew more about the subject than Bill himself, they were quite willing to let the old man return to his cottage to smoke his pipe in peace.

"We must plan a moonlight fishing trip," Peter said as they steadied the boat for Bill to clamber ashore. "Real fishing fleets go out at night, and I'll bet the water looks grand with the moonlight on it. I'm sure Uncle John wouldn't object, if Adam came along, of course."

Bill Stockton paused and looked back at the speaker, his weather-beaten face a mask of anxiety and genuine concern.

"You listen to me, young master!" he said slowly. "Don't go out on the sea at night. Not in these parts, anyhow. If you do you'll not come back! I'm a-warning ye!"

"Why, Mr. Stockton!" Jack's merry face was alight

with mischief. "What is it you're afraid of? Mermaids? And do they only come out at night, like the fairies?"

"I tell you it isn't safe," the old man repeated doggedly. "There's things 'appen around this coast that's best not talked about. But some folks won't be said. If you don't believe me, ask any of the fisher-folk. No use asking the coastguards. They don't believe, or they say they don't. But they're not local folk an' don't know the story. And they're youngsters. They'll learn."

The idea of either Sam Saunders or John Briggson, both of whom the children looked upon as friends, being spoken of as "youngsters" amused the foursome. Sam was at least thirty-five. John, a younger man, could not have been much under thirty.

"I suppose they seem young to you," Peter remarked, "but I think they are old enough to recognize danger, Mr. Stockton. They were both in the war, and they always seem very sensible people. What is it you're afraid of? If you don't tell us we'll *have* to ask them, and if they don't believe whatever it is, then there's no reason why we should not go fishing at night, is there?"

"I'll have to tell you," Bill gave a heavy sigh and swung round to face them, "though what Professor Bradley would say if he knew I could not tell. There's a ghost-boat!" he said in a suddenly hushed tone. "A boat which sails only at night, and only at low tide. It goes like the wind, and vanishes where the real boat was wrecked two hundred years ago, there, over by the Twin Fangs," he ended, pointing with the stem of his pipe.

"A ghost-boat?" Jack was openly laughing, but Peter hushed him with a wave of his arm.

"Who's seen it?" Peter asked quietly. "What boat was wrecked by the Fangs two hundred years ago?"

"A boat with a young man in it," Bill said heavily. "He

was the youngest son of the man who owned High Cliff House in those days. He wanted to marry a certain young lady and his dad didn't like the idea, so the lad and his girl decided to marry and run away to the Continent and to make their home there. They managed to get married, and the lad took with him all he could lay his hands on, and that was what gave him away. The old man missed the boy's bits and pieces, and set off after them. They were to row out from 'ere, from Nether Bay, and meet up with a sailing schooner bound from Whitby to foreign parts. Whitby was a great place for sailing in long-ago days."

"What happened?" Jack urged as the old sailor paused for breath.

"The old man gave chase," Bill said simply. "There was no reason for the accident, but local tales say the lad took fright, and I don't wonder. I expect he knew his father's temper by experience. Anyway, his boat was wrecked on the Fangs and 'im and his girl-bride drowned. Nobody saw the ghost-boat for years an' years. It's been seen, off an' on, but only lately it's been seen—or maybe I'd better say glimpsed—regular-like. Fishermen say to see it means a wreck. So," Bill turned with deliberation now and they knew nothing would detain him, "keep off the water at night, my young folks. Don't tempt what ye don't understand."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" Jack stared at the others and gave vent to what they were all more or less feeling on the subject. "Watery spooks, eh? Sounds interesting. I vote we have a shot at taking a close look at this ghost-boat or whatever it is. How do the rest of you feel about it?"

"I'm game, of course," Peter answered at once, "but," he gave a quick glance at his sister and Carol, "I think the girls had better keep out of it."

"What confounded cheek!"

"Not on your life!"

Carol and Ann spoke together, their faces so full of indignation that Adam began to laugh.

"We all go together," he announced. "Adam, he come too."

"Suits me," Peter grinned, hardly daring to look at his sister, "I just thought . . ."

"You shouldn't," Ann said briefly, "the exercise is so unaccustomed you're not very good at it. Next time you think, think how we can catch this ghost-boat. That will be something sensible. Come along, let's get back to Red House and plan our campaign. We can look at that chart of Uncle John's on the library wall. It gives all the local currents, under-water rocks and all the rest, I'm sure."

This plan was voted as excellent, and once the *Adventurer* was safely berthed in the boat-house, the party set off for home, only to find disappointment awaiting them. The Professor encountered them in the hall and with a delighted smile he listened to their thanks for the boat, then propelled them along in the direction of his huge library.

"I'm glad you like the boat," he said simply. "You'll have lots of fun with the *Adventurer*, I'm sure. You must be careful, of course, but I'm sure you will all prove trustworthy. Now come along and meet Mr. Arasim. He's the student I told you of this morning. I rang the phone number he gave me in his letter, and he was so keen he came at once. He arrived at Lyndhurst by air earlier this afternoon and came by taxi the rest of the way."



CHAPTER III

MR. ARASIM WALKS BY NIGHT

“WELL!” Peter was the first to speak once the friends and the ever faithful Adam had gained the shelter of the summer-house. “What do you think of Mr. Arasim?”

“He not good,” Adam said solemnly. “Adam like dog. He scent bad men. This man not here for good reason.”

“Don’t tell Uncle John that,” Peter laughed. “He thinks the study of Egyptology the last word in good reasons for anything.”

“That man not true student,” Adam insisted with a shake of his huge, ugly head. “That talk all cover and pretend for something else. Adam know, inside here,” and he tapped the side of his skull.

“Have it your own way, Adam. You’re probably right. He looks an ugly customer anyhow.” Jack glanced at the watch he had received as a present on his last birthday.

"If we don't hurry back to the house I bet he'll have wolfed all the supper, and I'm jolly hungry."

"You're never anything else," Carol teased, but she, along with the others, was hungry after their spell on the sea and so, without further argument, they set off back to Red House.

Mr. Arasim and the Professor were just about to sit down to supper as the children entered the dining-room, Adam, of course, going along to Franks in the kitchen. The Professor beamed on the children, while Mr. Arasim managed what Peter afterwards termed "a sickly sort of smile."

"I hear you have had a pleasant time on the sea," he remarked, as though attempting to be friendly. "The good Professor tells me you have a boat for your own use. You are indeed fortunate children. I trust you are all worthy sailors, as well as good swimmers, just in case of accident?"

"We have a boat-hook for . . ." Carol began, but Jack, with a touch of his foot under the table, silenced her.

"We'll be all right, sir," he said cheerfully. "Anyway, we all know the first thing to get if we fall into the sea."

"And what is that?" Mr. Arasim asked with a faint smile.

"We'd get wet, of course," Jack announced, and all joined in the laughter, all save the would-be student, who merely went on smiling.

He turned to the Professor, as though he had mentally decided to ignore such childish chatter as being unworthy of his attention.

"The taxi driver had an amusing story to tell," he said slowly. "According to the man there is some kind of a ghost-boat which is not to be looked upon, but which sails in the bay at night. Apparently the local people are

greatly awed by its appearance. Do you know anything about it, sir?"

"Not a thing," the Professor confessed, smiling. "And if I *had* heard about it, I doubt very much if I should have paid any attention. These small villages abound in such-like stories and legends, particularly along the sea coast. Old people tell the stories when the families sit around the fire on wintry nights. The next generation adds a little more, and so on, and so on. It is the same in every country."

"Then you do not believe in . . . ghosts?" Mr. Arasim asked softly, almost menacingly.

Before the Professor had time to do more than give the man a puzzled glance and remark, "Not *that* kind of ghost, anyway," Ann was speaking.

"Mr. Stockton said the ghost-boat only came at low tide," she began, but a sharp kick on the ankle from her brother made her add: "That's funny, isn't it?"

"It would be, if you could tell us when is a tide like tears?" Jack asked.

"I've got that!" Peter laughed across at his chum sensing that Jack too felt Mr. Arasim was too curious about the village and its legends. "When it's 'igh water—eye-water! That's it, isn't it? But we can't allow you that one, because there should be an H on the first high."

A friendly dispute broke out during the course of which the Professor was heard to remark:

"You children seem to be in a boisterous mood! I thought you would have tired yourselves out by all the fresh air and exercise. By the way, I have had Franks place a ping-pong table in the basement. Do you think it might be as well to work off a little of your exuberance before going up to bed? If you have had sufficient supper, that is, of course."

The foursome expressed themselves satisfied in the matter of supper, and almost overwhelmed the old gentleman with thanks for his thoughtfulness. First the *Adventurer* and now a ping-pong table! Adam, summoned by the Professor, said he would show them the way down to the basement and would stay to retrieve balls. Not in the least sorry to leave Mr. Arasim's uninspiring presence, they left the Professor and the would-be student and followed happily in Adam's wake.

They had played several vigorous games before Ann announced she was too tired to play any more. The others were in complete agreement and voted for the cool drinks they knew Franks would be sure to have for them, and so to bed. The basement of Red House could be reached by passing through Franks's kitchen, a difficult feat at the moment. Franks, as Adam had carefully explained, was having one of his periodical "moves around" as he termed it, and for the time being had placed the electric washer before the basement entrance. The other way, which they had perforce to use, was to go round to the back of the house and down an outside iron staircase.

"By far the better way," as Jack remarked.

Altogether this was a very satisfactory arrangement, so far as the foursome and Adam were concerned.

They had reached the kitchen door before Jack remembered he had taken off his watch before playing ping-pong. He explained to the others what had happened, and said he would go back for it, rejoining them in the kitchen within a few moments. He was as good as his word and had regained the kitchen door on the heels of the others when his attention was caught by what appeared to be a moving piece of masonry which, it seemed, juttied out at all angles from the old-fashioned building which was Red House.

Jack drew silently into the shadow made by the walls of the house and stood perfectly still, watching. The faint light of the moon showed the unmistakable figure of Mr. Arasim stealthily descending by means of the thick creeping plant which covered the walls. He had also the help of a convenient drain pipe. Quite motionless, Jack watched until the man, with frequent glances over his shoulder, made off down the short drive. Mr. Arasim kept well within the shadow of the scrubs which bordered the wide gravel path. His footsteps were almost soundless, and a far less suspicious person than Jack would have had reason to believe the man was up to no good.

"What ho!" the boy muttered to himself. "This requires a little investigation. I wonder where the Professor is just now?"

He said nothing of what he had seen as he accepted his glass of lemonade and plate of biscuits from Franks, but when they had said good night to Franks and Adam, he turned to the others.

"Let's say good night again to the Professor," he suggested. "I think, as he's done so much for us, a little extra courtesy will not go amiss."

"He will probably think we are a nuisance," Peter remarked, but no one made any serious objections, and the little party trooped off to the Professor's study from under the door of which a thin beam of light showed the old gentleman still at work.

His quiet voice answered theirs and they entered to find Professor Bradley sitting at his desk on which were spread papers and books in what Jack called with a grin, 'orderly confusion.' Although he was always busy the Professor was really rather a lonely old gentleman, and the companionship of the four intelligent children during the holidays gave him great pleasure. He was both pleased

and touched to find they had come to say "good night" again, and kept them chatting a few minutes. Finally he rose and accompanied them to the door, and it was then Jack had the opportunity to put his question.

"Your student, Professor . . . Mr. Arasim . . . he is not working with you to-night?"

"Not to-night, Jack," the Professor smiled kindly. "He has had a very tiring day, you know. He has travelled a long distance, and we have already put in some hours of study. No, he excused himself as being too tired to go on further and explained he was not used to working late at night. He said he would like to go to bed so that he would be quite fresh in the morning."

"Jolly good idea," Jack agreed. "Good night, sir."

It was not until the two boys were alone in their bedroom that Jack told his chum of what he had seen.

"You're sure . . . I mean," Peter broke off, grinning as his friend's indignant face told him what Jack thought of the idea he might have been mistaken. "It seems so pointless . . ."

"It *seems* so," Jack agreed, "but it also seems worth watching. What do you say? We might get an adventure out of this holiday after all. Unless," he added in a disappointed tone, "the blighter believes in this ghost-boat business and has gone out to look for it himself."

"He might." Peter spoke slowly, considering the possibility. "But I had the impression when he was talking about what the taxi driver was supposed to have said to him that he was trying to find out how much we knew about the legend, and how we felt on the subject."

"I had that impression too," Jack replied. "Tell you what, how about one of us watching to see what time our friend returns? We can change over after an hour."

"O.K." Peter agreed at once. "Bags me first watch. You saw him go. Give me a chance to see him return."

Jack was quite agreeable and was soon sound asleep. Peter took up a position behind the heavy curtains where he could see without being seen. But it was not his luck after all, to see the return of the wanderer. At the end of an hour he awakened Jack and himself rolled sleepily into his own bed. He seemed to have just fallen asleep when Jack was shaking him by the shoulder.

"He's climbing up now," Jack whispered. "His hair's all on end. Just like it was when we walked into the library. No Hair Oil about him now. He looks a regular Fuzzy Peg! He's just got going. There's time for you to see him, if you'll get a move on."

Peter was just in time to see one long leg drawn over the wide sill of one of the bedroom windows. It was disappointing not to have seen more, but at any rate he had seen enough to convince him that Jack was right and this was no ordinary student with a thirst for knowledge.

The more the boys talked the matter over and the more thought they gave to it, the more convinced were they that something strange was afoot. For one thing, Mr. Arasim seemed quite old to become a student, although, as Peter quite reasonably pointed out, there were cases of even elderly people taking up new studies, foreign languages and so on, and making quite a success of their new hobbies.

"This window-shinning business gets me," Peter added. "That's not an accepted part of the programme. Unless he suffers from sleep-walking. Even then I've never heard of anyone being able to clamber about like *that* in their sleep!"

"It does seem funny," Jack smothered a yawn, "and anyhow we meant to scout round and look for this ghost-boat or whatever it is after what Bill Stockton said. He is

only giving us an added reason for investigation. In fact, he may be just what was needed to give spice to the adventure. I'm for sleep now! We promised to go to Miss Lavender's before breakfast, remember?"

They were up early the next morning and went with Adam to Sea-View Cottage to see a tearful Miss Lavender who, at the last moment, could not bring herself to part with her kittens.

"Don't take any notice of me," she wept as the two boys strove to comfort her. "I know I am a silly old woman. I can't afford to keep them, and I cannot bear to have them drowned! And I can't stand putting them into those awful boxes, either, although Mr. Lee assures me he will take good care of them and that he will only sell them to kind people. His only regret is that he cannot take more than a few every two months or so."

Adam, who had been on his knees before a tangled mass of soft fur, waving paws and tails which represented the batch of kittens Miss Lavender had hoped to dispatch, looked up sympathetically.

"I can take kittens gently, for Miss Lavender," he offered. "You go out," he addressed the old lady, "while Adam put kittens softly, gently, into boxes! Yes? Or," his ugly face lit up with a smile as an idea suddenly struck him: "we can take the kittens in our arms to Red House. Franks fetch us and them in car. Then we look after them for Miss Lavender. Adam go to Fairwater often. He take one or two at once and make sure man keep his word about taking care of them."

"That's an idea," Peter was enthusiastic. "We'll ask Uncle John, but I'm sure it will be all right. We're going back to the house now to pick up a picnic basket—and to have some more breakfast—we'll ask him then and come back and tell you what he says, Miss Lavender."

The old lady was really grateful, and when, an hour or so later, the idea was put to Professor Bradley the children found him agreeable.

"Excuse my butting in like this, Professor," the smooth tones of Mr. Arasim broke in on their conversation, "but perhaps I can help a little in this matter! In London I have a friend who has a wonderful pet store. He tells me he cannot get enough kittens. Of course, they must be well bred, but you say these of the old lady are pedigree cats. My friend loves all animals. His entire life has been devoted to them in one way or another. His clients are all well-connected people who would take good care of any pet they bought. If your Miss Lavender will entrust me with her kittens I will have my friend send his special, satin-lined cat-baskets for them. They will travel in safety and comfort. My friend may even come for them himself."

The Professor thought this a wonderful idea, so did the two girls. Peter and Jack had to agree it seemed the best solution of Miss Lavender's problem.

The children agreed to go with Franks in the car, taking Mr. Arasim to meet Miss Lavender and to put his suggestion to her. Yet as they fetched the picnic basket from the kitchen for Franks to leave at the beach en route, Jack and Peter exchanged glances, each wondering exactly what lay behind Mr. Arasim's seemingly innocent suggestion.



CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST CODED MESSAGE

THE foursome had spent a tiring and exciting day. The visit to Miss Lavender's cottage, in company with Mr. Arasim, had provided them with the knowledge that Miss Lavender could count on receiving four guineas each for her Siamese kittens and from one to three guineas each for the others. So far as Miss Lavender's future finances were concerned, this appeared to be a very satisfactory arrangement. The old lady had confessed to them she was almost without means of support for herself after she had carefully catered for the needs of her pets, a fact which had brought quick tears of sympathy to the eyes of the girls.

The children listened to the conversation, noting Miss Lavender's gratitude mixed with her sincere sorrow because she must part with her kittens. They heard Mr. Arasim's smooth tones as he assured the old lady the kit-

tens would be kindly treated, taken great care of during the journey, and would be certain of a good home. Yet although not one of the foursome had put their thoughts into words, each knew the others were in agreement in believing Mr. Arasim was not the type of man to concern himself with the woes and worries of a strange old lady, and that, therefore, he must have some interest in the matter other than helping Miss Lavender. The most obvious conclusion, of course, was that he must have some interest—financially—in his friend's pet store and was therefore pleased with himself at having found an additional source of income.

After hearing the arrangements concluded, the children asked Franks to drop them at the beach and spent a happy day sailing, fishing and swimming. The *Adventurer* proved an endless delight and by now they were more confident in their handling of the boat. The fact that Peter was the champion swimmer of the Middle School rather took the "spice from the pudding," as Jack phrased it, but since Jack more than held his own in the matter of speed on land, the rivalry was quite friendly.

It was on the way back to Red House and the supper they knew would be awaiting them that Adam had the bright idea of making the basement a refuge of their own for the duration of the holidays. The suggestion was received with enthusiasm, and when the idea was put to Franks he said at once he was sure the Professor would have no objection. It was typical of the man that he immediately set to work to help them in every way he could.

A small electric cooking stove was unearthed from the garage, cleaned and plugged into the basement switch. Tested, it proved to be as sound as the day Franks discarded it in favour of the new and larger cooker the

Professor had purchased. Franks gave them a quick, authoritative lesson on the use of the stove and Carol became the proud owner of a book of simple recipes, each of which could be competently cooked on their new possession. A basket of kitchen crockery, three small pans and one small frying pan, a kettle and a good selection of eatables, tinned and in packages, comprised Franks's next contribution. With great glee the foursome made off with their "loot," planning many happy hours to come.

At last, with several boxes hastily converted into chairs and stools by Peter, Jack, Franks and Adam, with an old, wobbly table covered by four new, checked dusters sewn into a square and with a vase of flowers in the centre, the basement looked a snug and attractive enough refuge for any wet day or evening.

Peter straightened himself up after his unsuccessful efforts to make the table firm, surveying the scene with a rueful grin.

"Mr. Phipps," he named the school's woodwork instructor, "would have a fit if he saw this," he announced. "But at any rate the chairs and stools haven't collapsed."

"Not yet," Jack agreed, "but this one keeps groaning."

"What are you doing?" Peter swung round suspiciously. "You've been pouring over that notebook for hours. If you want to know, I've worked out Miss Lavender will get twenty pounds for that first lot of kittens. Not bad . . . if she didn't feel so upset at letting them go."

"Anyone can understand her feelings," Ann said in a sympathetic tone. "If they were mine I'd hate to part with even one. They're all darlings."

"She can't keep all that number," Jack said, obviously only half listening. "But that's not what I was trying to work out. Look here."

He held out a sheet of notepaper covered with figures,

and Peter, leaning over his shoulder, began to read aloud.

"Low water in Open Bay. August eleventh, ten fourteen p.m. Low water August twelfth, eleven seventeen p.m. . . ." Peter broke off and looked at his chum. "Where did you get all this, and what on earth is it all in aid of?"

"I got the figures from the coastguards," Jack said so smugly that Peter laughed aloud. "I said I was interested . . . I had to get them all, of course. If I had simply asked for these I've put on top of the page they would have wondered what it was all about."

"So am I, you juggins," Peter laughed. "I just asked you that question. Remember?"

"Well," Jack folded the paper and put it carefully away in his pocket, "I thought that as we'd rigged up this room so well, we could say 'good night' to your uncle to-night, say, round about a quarter to ten, as usual. Then, instead of going up to bed we can slip back down here. If Hair-Oil, or Fuzzy Peg, his name depending on the condition of his wig, goes snooping about, we'll follow him. If you remember what I told you about last night, then he was out of this house just about time for low tide."

"And that," said Ann as she and Carol came closer to listen, "is the time the ghost-boat or whatever it is is supposed to haunt. Problem," she laughed, "can a boat haunt?"

"We'll go into that some other time," Peter said, the light of adventure in his eyes. "Anyhow, to-night's the testing night. We'd better slip down to the boat-house and make the *Adventurer* ready to sail."

"It's almost a quarter to nine now," Jack told them. "We've just about an hour."

"I'll make some cocoa and put it in two flasks," Carol suggested. "It may be cold on the water at night. You

two and Adam go on down to the boat-house, though I'm inclined to think it would be a better plan to get out to sea first and keep our watch from off the water. We can hug the coast. It would be better than to risk getting out to sea when Hair-Oil might see or hear us."

"I think you've hit on a good idea," Peter nodded. "O.K. You two get cracking, and for goodness sake pack some biscuits or something. If I have to stay awake at night I'm always hungry."

"You'll be as bad as Jack soon," Ann smiled. "But we'll fix something, don't worry."

Within a matter of minutes the two girls were at work, Carol at the stove, Ann in raiding the box of good things Franks had supplied from his store room. Adam and the two boys were not away for very long, and by quarter to ten the basket of food, the flasks and two torches were stowed in the *Adventurer* and the boat itself riding silently, fastened by a rope, on the little tongue of water which almost lapped the steps of the boat-house.

The Professor wished them an absent-minded "good night" and said he was glad to know they were tired enough to want to go to bed! They appeared, he remarked, to have an inexhaustible supply of energy, and if they were tired he took it as proof they were having a good holiday. Feeling rather guilty in their deception of the gentle old scholar, the foursome made a detour of the hall and crept outside and back to the basement.

From there they stole out, one by one, keeping in the shadows as they went down the drive. Adam led, since he could see in the dark almost as well as a cat could have done, and it was fairly easy for the others to follow his squat, bulky shape. Not until they were safely out at sea did they speak a whisper.

"I vote we sail behind the Twin Fangs," Peter said,

naming the two tapering hunks of rock which stood up, sharply dark, against the summer night sky. "We'll be in fairly calm water there."

"All right." Jack was at the tiller, the two boys taking turns to handle the boat. "It's ten past. Only four minutes to go to low water. Listen!" he broke off sharply. "What's that?"

"You've got the jumps!" Carol said after a minute or so. "It's an aeroplane coming in from the sea. Maybe the chap we heard the other night, the one with the private plane. He's flying pretty low, by the sound of his engine!"

They sat in silence, not knowing what, if anything, to expect, each of them tense and alert. Adam, crouched low in the boat, was not scanning the sky as were the children. He kept his cat's gaze on the slowly heaving waters, simply because for some reason unknown to himself the phrase "low water" seemed to have impressed itself on his brain. He had no idea what to expect, but suddenly he knew his instinct had been correct, and that he was not to be disappointed.

"Look!"

The others had already seen the object which intrigued Adam, and they needed no bidding to follow the direction of his pointing finger. The aeroplane had circled round, seaward from them, circled again and yet again, then turned and headed down the coast. But on the sea a small light had begun to glow, a light which moved with such swiftness that the eyes of the foursome had difficulty in following its progress.

"Whatever it is, it's heading straight for the Twin Fangs," Peter said. "Move Jack. Let's follow it."

The *Adventurer's* engine began to throb and the little craft moved over the water at its maximum speed, but it

was impossible to get anywhere within reach of the little glowing light. Adam strained to see the direction in which the strange light was moving. A sudden change in the current swung him sideways, abruptly, so that he tilted his head with an involuntary movement, a movement which gave him a host of ideas, as he was to explain later. At the time he could only pull at Peter's sleeve and indicate a second light which glowed from the top of High Cliff. A light which remained steady, in contrast to that on the water which bobbed as though fastened to a cork and at the mercy of every movement of the waves. Yet, even as they watched, there was a further dramatic moment to come.

"It's gone!" Jack made the announcement expressing the astonishment they all felt. "Just disappeared!"

"It went between the Fangs," Peter said, and Adam grunted his confirmation of this statement. "Yet we ought to be able to see it, even so."

"I wish this thing would move a bit faster," Jack was suddenly scornful of their own progress. "We might have seen . . ."

"Careful!" Carol warned. "There's an awful undertow round the Fangs. It's even mentioned on the Professor's chart . . ."

They cruised carefully round the black shape of the rocks for a few minutes, their eyes scanning the darkness for that small, glowing light which had so mysteriously vanished, but all in vain. The waters were dark and deserted. There was no sign of any light amid that inky blackness of the slowly heaving sea. Yet on top of High Cliff, somewhere in the vicinity of Cliff House, the other light burned steadily.

"I vote we go home now and come again in daylight. The whatever it was hasn't gone *round* the Fangs, or at

least, if it did, there's no sign of it now. We've lost the trail for to-night, I think," said Jack.

"O.K.," Peter sounded as disappointed as he felt, "we'd better turn for home. But we'll have another try to-morrow night," he added.

The *Adventurer* swung round in the water, leaving a swirl in her wake, and the disappointed children settled back to accept defeat. Adam alone changed his position. He sat back on his folded legs, in a cramped, uncomfortable manner, but in such a way that his face was upturned to the place on the cliff from which had come the other small glowing light. The cliff top was in darkness now, but Adam was trying to visualize High Cliff House as he had last seen it. Quite suddenly the light glowed again, then began to flicker, a faint gleam, but enough to be seen if one were looking for it, against the darkness of the night. Adam pulled Peter's sleeve.

"Can you see it?" he whispered. "Is that signal?"

Peter followed the direction of Adam's pointing arm. The wee light flickered, went out, shone for a split second, then for a little longer.

"You're right, Adam," Peter breathed. "That's the morse code. Now, if only I can remember . . ."

He began to spell out the letters as the light signalled them, aware they had missed the first word or so and hoping it would not matter very much. Perhaps the signaller might repeat the message.

"Dot, dash and two dots," whispered Peter. "L . . dot . . . that's E. Dot dash. A. Dot, dot, dot, dash."

"That's V," Ann murmured excitedly. "And now E again. Makes Leave."

Peter ignored his sister and went on spelling out the signals, knowing Jack would fit the letters together.

"Dot dash," said Peter without waiting for Jack to con-

firm the letter as A he went on: "Dash, dot . . . that's N. Dash, dot, dash, dash. Any!" he announced triumphantly.

"Dash, dash," Carol was in it too, by this time. "M, dot, E, three dots twice. That's two S's. A again, G and E."

"Leave any message," Jack said excitedly. "Go on, get the rest. I'll remember it all."

"Three dots. That's S again. Now E. A follows, then L."

Peter hesitated for a moment as the signaller paused, but it seemed there was more to follow.

"C," he read. "Now O. There's V and E again. Now a J."

"Leave any message in Seal Cove, signed J," Jack repeated as the light went out and had, apparently, vanished altogether. "Do you know where that is, Adam?"

"Small cave near base of cliffs, close to Fangs," Adam said. "Seal washed up there long ago. Cove named for Seal ever since, many years now, Adam think."

"Then we'll beach the *Adventurer* and creep over to the cave," Peter suggested. "All agreed? The motor might give us away, or the splash of oars. And we can't see from the water who the person is whose job it is to leave the message, that's if there is one to leave to-night. That's a chance we have to take."

"All agreed," the others confirmed, Jack adding: "and we'd better move quickly, too."

In a short time they were stealthily following Adam who knew every inch of cover on the cliff face, both in daylight and in the darkness. Suddenly they were halted by the little man. They stood perfectly still as, not a hundred yards away from the entrance to the cave, they saw a figure hurrying away from the cave entrance along

the narrow strip of sand which led to the cliff path. It was not possible to get a clear view of the man's face, but the four children and Adam had no difficulty in recognizing the outline of Mr. Arasim as, gaining height, he was for a second or so, outlined before them in the dim light. There was no mistaking the shape of his head or the set of his shoulders.

They pressed closely to the cliff face, seeking cover, and after what seemed an eternity, Adam urged them gently forward once more. Once inside the cave it was difficult to see anything at first, for the light of their torches had to be carefully guarded. Then Adam pounced on a small wash-leather pouch which lay propped between two stones.

"Here," he said. "See!"

Peter took the pouch and extracted a folded paper. For a moment he stared at it in surprise, then exclaimed:

"Pencil . . . quick, somebody. I have a notebook. This is in code. We'll copy it out and leave the original where old Hair-Oil placed it. Whoever signalled knows to expect a message here and may be on his way to collect it right now. We've simply got to move fast."

In a few moments the message was copied into the notebook and the original message replaced in the pouch, the pouch then being returned to its position between the two stones. Then the party headed for Red House without wasting a second on the way. They made straight for the basement.

"I'll make some more cocoa," Carol volunteered. "It was cold on the water, I thought, and we'll all do a lot better if we get warmed through first."

Peter tore the page from his notebook and placed it on the rickety table top. The others grouped themselves about him as they studied the queerly written message.

"We've done these things in class tests," Jack remem-

bered, "but this one looks a regular stinker! I don't often wish our form master was present, but he'd be a real help just now. We'll never solve this!"

"We'll have a dashed good try, anyhow," Peter said firmly. "Let's start by making a copy for each of us. Come along, Carol," he smiled as she approached with the quickly made jug of cocoa. "That's grand! Now you have a piece of paper too." He tore out leaves from his notebook and passed them round. "I'll read out the message and we'll all take it down. Then we can work at it either together or, if one of us has a bright idea when alone, then we'll all have a copy to which we can refer."

"O.K." Jack said. "Fire away!"

"F. F," Peter read, slowly and clearly. "2 Q W P
F B 3 P X C B J F 4 I X L S H X F 5 T I B 4 E O L W
P B 1 B G B 7 Z E T L F 1 T N V T U B 6 M Y F 5 J
D T Z B 4 W N B 6 U M C G "

"Crikey!" Jack stared at his copy after Peter had re-read by way of a check, "we're stuck now, all right!"

Indeed it seemed they were, for although they each tried their hardest it seemed impossible to find any clue to the whole.

"It's a joke," Carol said suddenly, tearing her paper into shreds. "And even if it isn't, I'm tired and I'm going to bed."

"We'll all go." Peter folded his paper up and carefully placed it inside his wallet. "I don't think it's a joke. I can't imagine Hair-Oil's sense of humour leading him to climb cliffs and whatnot in the dark. I think we'll find it has something to do with that queer thing we saw on the sea. I vote we only keep one copy, in case the message is important, and we lose one, giving our secret away. Anyway, it makes the holiday more interesting, whatever it turns out to be."

After a little conversation the others agreed and, tired and puzzled, they crept to bed, Peter with his copy of the message in his wallet, the others having been destroyed.

They were all very sleepy when Adam brought the trays the following morning, and only his announcement to the boys that Mr. Arasim had received four special cat-baskets from his friend with the pet shop, served to rouse them.

"He's been mighty quick," Peter grumbled, pulling on his clothes. "Wonder how he's done it. Telephone, I suppose. But why the hurry?"

"Of course he's used the telephone." Jack was brushing his hair. "As to the hurry, you can safely say friend Arasim has a share in the pet store and wants to be hold of the profits."

"Maybe so," Peter agreed, looking out of the window and adding: "There he goes, off with Franks to fetch the kittens. Poor Miss Lavender, she *will* be upset."

"We ought to have been up and gone with them," Jack commented, "but it's too late now. Anyhow, she's doing as she wished, giving her pets a good home and herself a small income."

The Professor was at the table and greeted them with his usual genial smile. With Mr. Arasim absent the conversation was greatly eased, and in this new, jovial mood of his the children were astonished and delighted to hear the Professor asking for snapshots of their activities during the year.

"Photography used to be quite a hobby of yours, I remember," he said to Carol. "I know you'll have some good snapshots to show to me."

Small pictures of the chums at school, at home, in camp, were passed round until Jack remembered the one Carol had taken of Peter and himself as nigger minstrels at the

school's Christmas concert. The two boys had felt rather proud of their make-up and costumes which they had designed themselves in the art classes.

"It's a jolly good one, sir," he enthused, "but mine's upstairs."

"Mine's here," Peter produced his wallet and drew out the picture and with it the piece of paper with the code message! Before he had time to say anything his uncle had picked up the paper, his eyes twinkling.

"More of your fun," he commented. "And very interesting. Codes used to be a hobby of mine. Let me make a copy of this one and then tell me if I have decoded it correctly."

It was impossible to tell him where or how they had found the code, and for some reason which he could not explain, Peter felt it imperative to keep the matter from the stranger, Mr. Arasim.

"Right-ho, sir," he said with false heartiness, "but . . . it's a serious affair. A surprise for you," he improvised hopefully. "If you *do* decode it, promise, on your word of honour, that you'll keep the message a secret between we four, Adam and yourself. No one else. Don't give it away to Mr. Arasim or even Franks," he added, hoping to convince by his tone.

For a moment the Professor hesitated, looking puzzled. Then he laughed.

"It's a promise," he said. "Here, Peter, I'll shake hands on that!"



CHAPTER V WRECKED!

THE children, anxious to watch the Professor in action, grouped themselves about him as he spread out the paper on the table top. With his spectacles fixed firmly on his nose he settled down to a state of concentration.

"The first point," he said, "is to copy out the message myself, I shall in that way fix the letters in my subconscious mind."

Slowly and carefully, saying the letters and figures aloud as he wrote them down, the Professor copied the message.

"FF. 2 QWP. FB 3 PX. CB JF. 4 I XLS. H X F 5
T I B 4 E O L W P B 1 B G B 7 Z E T. L F 1 T. N V T
U B 6 M. Y F 5 J. D T Z B 4. W N B 6 U M C G."

The Professor smiled broadly as if the problem amused him.

"Quite a nice little teaser," he remarked, "and now to write down the alphabet," which he proceeded to do.

"A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y and Z," concluded the Professor. "Now to work."

For a moment he studied the letters then turned to the children and said; "The first question I ask myself is this: 'Are there any peculiarities you notice about the letter and figure arrangements?'" and when it seemed apparent no one intended to help him or to put forward any clue he pointed with one long, bony finger, saying: "Each time a figure is used it is preceded by one of two letters, F or B. I am correct, am I not?"

"Yes . . . and if you run quickly through all the words you can think of beginning with F or B the two most obvious are 'forward' and 'backward.' I think you have a definite clue there, Uncle John . . ."

"Good." The Professor smiled at Peter, well pleased. "Now! F is the first letter, but another F precedes the number, so we will ignore the first one and consider the second. If this F means forward and the number two follows it, then the letter Q, we must, I think, try the letter two forward from Q, which gives us S. Then two letters forward from W gives us Y, two forward from P which gives us R. Then we meet another F, followed by a B which precedes the number three, so off we go again. The F, if we follow out the two forward, gives us H. Then, going back from P three letters we get M, back from X three letters . . . U . . ." he paused, studying the message he had written.

"F (forward two) S. Y R," he read. "H, then back three, M U . . . No! I am wrong somewhere. This doesn't make sense."

"It seems to me," Ann began to giggle, "it's rather like the time when Miss Timpkins was chased by the billy goat from the farm at the bottom of school lane. Miss Timpkins said the goat had her cornered, so she grabbed it by

the horns and, as she told us, she and the goat went 'backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards until she didn't know whether she was going backwards *or* forwards.' She said it was all very confusing."

"I should think it would be," Jack grinned.

Amid the general laughter the Professor merely smiled, then said:

"I think that has given me an idea, Ann. Backwards *and* forwards. If you people *really* wanted to complicate this code, then to have to read forward for *backward* and vice versa, could be an ideal way. Let me try it and see. Don't tell me!"

The chums exchanged glances. It had been ideal for the Professor to believe the code their invention, but it would be very difficult to explain how they had really come by the paper.

Carefully working as he had just done, but substituting the word *forward* for the letter B and the word *backward* for the letter F, the Professor began to write again.

"F," wrote the Professor spelling the words aloud. "(Back two) OUN D (forward three) SA FEM (back four) ETHODT (back five) OD (forward four) ISPAT (forward one) CH (forward seven) GLA S (back one) S MUS T (forward six) S E (back five) E YOU (forward four) AR (forward six) ASIM."

Now that the letters were clear the rest seemed simple. It was hard to say just who grouped one set of letters and then another. The foursome were so excited they could not work fast enough. In a matter of minutes the message lay for them all to read.

"Found safe method to dispatch glass. Must see you. Arasim."

"Really, children!" there was a note of disapproval in the Professor's tone, "it is one thing to play a joke on me

and quite another to take in vain the name of a man who is a guest in my house. If Mr. Arasim should hear of this he may feel insulted, not understanding it to be a joke."

The children looked at one another, each sure in his or her mind that there was more in this message than they or the Professor could possibly guess. It was Peter who broke the rather strained silence.

"I don't want to be rude, sir," he began politely, "but last year, if you remember, you laughed when we said there was danger in your going to stay in that strange house. There was! A gang of crooks used every desperate means in their power to gain possession of the papyrus on which you were working, so that they could rob the tombs of their valuables. I don't know what this message means but . . . we found it! We didn't write it ourselves, as we allowed you to think we did. What, if I may ask, Uncle John, do *you* know of Mr. Arasim?"

"I . . . well, only what you yourselves know," the Professor admitted, now obviously worried. "I read his letter to you all. I invited him here and he came. I know nothing more of him than that. Why?"

"Because," Peter said slowly, "there is this message for one thing. For another, each of the two nights he has been here we have seen him leave this house after dark, when he had already told you he intended to rest. He acts suspiciously, you must admit, and . . . well, if you would only believe we found this message and had no idea what it would mean when decoded until you worked it out just now, and that we don't want Mr. Arasim to know we found it . . . that's all, sir," he concluded lamely.

"It all sounds very peculiar." The Professor quite evidently did not know what to make of the story. "However, I will keep your secret, and we will lock this message in the safe. You may be right about Mr. Arasim," he

granted reluctantly, "but so far we have no actual proof he is doing anything wrong. He may have simply gone for a stroll because he could not sleep. A number of unexpected types of people are victims of insomnia. There may be one of any number of possible explanations. Or you may be right and there *is* something queer afoot. If that is so, then *please*," he almost pleaded, "be very careful. The adventure of last year almost cost you, Peter, your life. Remember? Even the memory of that occasion makes me feel uneasy."

"That's all right, sir." Peter was relieved to hear his uncle was taking the matter in this way and thought it better not to mention Mr. Arasim's unusual method of leaving the house on his nightly prowls. "But if you *are* going to lock that message in the safe, would you be kind enough to do it now, please? I think I hear Franks returning with the car."

The Professor hurried off to his study to place the paper in his safe and the four children, with Adam at their heels, went outside. There were four baskets, each containing a Siamese kitten. The children were amazed as Mr. Arasim, a beaming smile on his face, opened one basket after the other to show them the beautiful padded linings of satin, with ventilation space, ample room for the animal to move in comfort, and a small compartment for a drinking vessel.

"The kittens will be comfortable," he said, closing the lids carefully. "My friend is sending his own transport for them. It is better that they go privately and by road. They will arrive without delay and be driven with every care. Ah," he broke off, staring down the drive. "I think he is here now."

A shooting brake, painted dark green, came speeding up the drive, a squat-looking, thick-set man at the wheel.

He greeted Mr. Arasim and indicated the baskets, completely ignoring everyone else.

"These all?" he asked, and receiving a nod, picked them up and carefully wedged them on to the seat beside him. "I'll take good care of them, sir," he said, and with a final nod from Mr. Arasim, the shooting brake drove away.

"Well!" Carol turned to the others as Mr. Arasim went indoors. "He certainly doesn't waste time talking. I think Ann and I ought to go and see Miss Lavender and find out how she feels about all this. She is certain to be very upset. Will you two take the lunch and wait for us on the beach?"

"O.K. And we'll take the cricket set," Jack suggested. "And the beach ball. Meet us down there as soon as you like."

Half an hour later Peter and Jack lay full length on the sands, the picnic basket between them, the sunshine warm on their backs. There was no one else in sight throughout the length and breadth of the entire beach, and not a sound to be heard save the calling of the seabirds and the sound of the waves. Half sitting up Jack began to trace an outline on the sands with the blade of his penknife. Leaning on his elbow, Peter watched.

"What's that?" he asked lazily. "Looks like a map of the coast around here."

"It is." Jack pointed with the blade of his knife. "Look, the Fangs are only about fifty yards from the foot of High Cliff. We know the tide never goes out completely from there, so it is impossible to look round the base of the cliff. We also know that whatever it was we followed last night went through the gap between the Fangs and was nowhere to be seen on the other side. Whatever it was, it couldn't have drifted into Nether Bay for two reasons. The current would be against it, and

there is a line of barely-submerged rock across the channel entrance, according to the map the coastguards showed me. What I want to know is, where did whatever it is go when we lost track of it?"

"There's only one answer," Peter said slowly. "It must have submerged! I've been thinking about this too, and it struck me that whatever we saw was being directed to a certain place dead in line with the Fangs. If it *does* submerge, which at the moment seems to be the only logical explanation, there is no reason for it to pass between the rocks. It could have avoided that."

"But . . . there was no sound of a motor. Whatever it was, it was not large enough for anyone to be aboard and steer, otherwise we'd at least have seen a blur on the water. However, if you think back to the last lecture we had at the Model Club last term, I think you may come to the same conclusion as myself."

"Control by radio impulse!" Peter breathed after a moment of thought. "By Jove! I hadn't thought of that! That explains the first light on top of High Cliff."

"*And* the fact that the same light wasn't used to signal," Jack pointed out. "Remember, we were heading for home, well away from the place where the thing was dropped—assuming it to have been dropped from the aircraft—and well away from where it disappeared. We were in a direct line where anyone on the sand dunes would be in exactly the same bearing, but the light which burned so steadily was facing directly over the sea, in a line with the Fangs."

"You've got something there, Jack," Peter acknowledged. "Shut up now," he added. "Here come the girls. Don't say anything until we're certain. We'll be going out again to-night, I expect."

They spent a merry afternoon on the beach, returning

to Red House hungry and a little tired. Once having eaten, they retired to the basement to spend the time before their supposed bedtime relaxing in readiness for the night's adventures which they felt certain lay ahead of them. Excitement chased away any lingering feeling of weariness and they lounged about, reading and talking, after their evening meal and so felt quite refreshed.

Professor Bradley looked at them with suspicion as they bade him good night, but he made no comment so the children felt he was trying to make generous allowance for whatever adventure they had in hand. In consequence they did not feel, as on the previous night, they were being mean in deceiving him.

"Low water at eleven seventeen to-night," Jack announced as they prepared to launch the *Adventurer*. "It will be darker than it was last night. We shall have difficulty in seeing anything but the lights, I suppose, even if there is anything *to* see."

"It cuts both ways," Carol commented. "If it's too dark for us to see other people then it must also be too dark for them to see us!"

"Talk in whispers," Peter cautioned. "We don't know who may be about or where or why."

Nothing more was said until they were well out in Open Bay. Suddenly Carol whispered:

"If we *could* sail close to the cliffs—close to the base of High Cliff—maybe we could see where this thing goes once it has passed the Fangs. Would it be too dangerous, Peter?"

It was Peter's turn at the tiller and they were sailing without lights. He realized at once it would not be an easy task to risk going too close to the rocky base of the menacing cliffs. After his talk with Jack, however, the suggestion struck him as an ideal way to find out what

they wanted to know. Yet they must remember also that if the idea of radio impulse control was correct, then they too might be observed when whoever operated the transmitter looked for the object. That was a risk they must be prepared to take! He grunted approval of the suggestion and turned the craft at once in the direction of High Cliff.

They anchored just far enough from the base of the cliff to make the girls shudder in fright. Adam too, who, despite being a good swimmer, hated cold water, shuddered as he listened to the sound of the sea as it made sucking noises against the base of the cliff. The sound was anything but reassuring as they waited tensely and in silence for whatever may happen next.

They had not long to wait. At precisely eleven sixteen they heard the sound of the approaching aircraft somewhere over the sea, drawing nearer until it was evidently circling as it had done the previous night. Instinctively their muscles tensed, their eyes strained as they gazed intently into the darkness.

Again, and with the same dramatic suddenness, they saw the tiny light appear on the water, bobbing its way towards the Fangs. It was lost for a moment, as before, then appeared to pass straight between the Fangs, so that they had a fleeting glimpse of a tiny dark shape with a small light upheld on a slender rod, then the whole thing sank down beneath the waves.

"There!" Jack whispered excitedly. "I told you! and your guess was right, Peter! It *did* submerge! I bet we're right about the rest as well, if we could only find proof."

"There's only one way to find out where it goes next," Peter whispered slowly. "That's to dive in and follow it."

"You couldn't, Peter!" Ann's whisper held all the horror and terror she knew she must experience if her

beloved brother, swimmer though he may be, carried out his suggestion. "What did you mean about being right about the rest?" she queried.

"We . . . that is . . . Jack remembered a lecture we had at school . . ."

Peter broke off as a wave larger than those which had preceded it, suddenly washed their small craft up against the rocks. It was the moment Peter had intended to guard against, and, his attention taken by the conversation, he had failed to be prepared. There was a sound of splintering wood and water began to leak into the *Adventurer*.

"Jump for the smaller rocks, everyone," he said sharply. "I don't know how badly damaged we are, but that's our only chance. Adam! Help the girls!"

Adam made one of his surprising cat-like leaps and landed a trifle unsteadily at first on the seaweed covered, slippery surface of the partly submerged mass of boulders which made up the base of High Cliff. He recovered his balance quickly, and at once his long arms reached out and helped first Ann and then Carol to comparative safety, while Peter and Jack fought to keep the *Adventurer* from being dashed to pieces, it now being obvious their anchor rope had been severed by a sharp piece of rock.

"If we could lift her on to that sort of rocky platform try when the next wave helps to lift—then maybe she'd be safe there. Bill Stockton could perhaps come with us in the morning to get her off."

Wet and shivering, not only with the chill of the water and the cool night breeze, but partly for fear of what might yet happen to the two boys, Ann and Carol stood behind Adam. Surefooted as a cat, the little man used his nimbleness and length of arm to reach the boys. At last the *Adventurer* was safely on the shelf-like piece of rock, and with the aid of the torches they saw she was not

damaged below the water-line, as they had feared, but that the wood had been splintered along the top edge near the bows. The foursome could not repress a shudder as they realized what might so easily have been their own fate. The rocks had torn the boat's timber with ease. Their softer bodies may very easily have been torn to pieces.

"Not so bad," Peter announced grimly. "If we can repair that in the morning she'll be fit for use to-morrow night. Not like ripping a hole in the bottom!"

"Always providing we can get the boat away from here without further damage!" Ann commented.

"And also providing," Carol tried to sound amusingly mocking to hide her distress, "we can get away from here ourselves! So far as I can see we can't swim away from here and there's almost sheer cliff to climb. It seems we're stuck until someone rescues us."

"Adam go first," announced that individual firmly. "Adam find way. He know cliff. Tie belts together, please, and follow. Peter next to me, then Ann, then Carol and last Jack."

Not one of them even thought of arguing with him. They knew he had probably forgotten more about cliff climbing than they had ever known. In this instance they were prepared to accept his leadership, having every confidence in his skill and knowledge.

It was hard going, even with Adam to lead the way, to find the possible foot-holds and hand-grips and to whisper instructions. At long last they were on top of High Cliff itself, the sheer height making the girls feel giddy as they paused, almost on the edge, to regain their breath. To their great astonishment almost straight before them lay the huge shape of Cliff House.

"No lights to be seen now," Ann whispered. "It looks awful."

"We can't see the lights because of being close to that high wall," Jack whispered in return. "Look out!"

"What are you doing here?"

Jack's quick ears had caught the sound of the man's stealthy approach, but too late for them to run. They were held in the beam of a powerful torch which rendered them visible, momentarily blinded them, and acted as a shield for their questioner. Peter reacted first.

"We're wrecked," he said crisply. "We were out fishing and our boat was caught in the current. We were almost swept into Nether Bay, but ended up on some rocks down there, at the base of the cliff."

"How did you get up here, then?" The question was shot at them. "There's no lift!"

"We climbed . . . scrambled up is more correct," Peter replied. "Now we are on our way home."

"You had better come in first and have a hot drink," the man's tone was more friendly now. "I expect you have a few cuts and scratches between you, too. How you ever climbed up there is a miracle. This way. Follow me, and be careful where and how you tread."

Without waiting for any comment, or even to see whether or not they were following, he strode ahead of them to a small gate which was let into the high wall.



CHAPTER VI

ADAM INVESTIGATES

THE foursome followed their accidental host through the narrow little gate into what seemed a wild, tangled garden, with a pathway literally hacked through the vegetation. It was obvious the garden had been untouched for years, and that the present owner of High Cliff House was not an enthusiast where landscape gardening was concerned!

The man strode ahead, evidently well used to the rough way underfoot, for he did not stumble, as the children did from time to time, over the old tree roots, the pot-holes and other obstacles it was impossible to see until too late to avoid them.

Screened lights shone dimly from the windows of most of the downstairs rooms of the huge house. In the reflection of one of the windows the children and Adam observed a small veranda, half built of stone and then

covered with glass above. Instinctively each of them felt the sight of this veranda fix itself in his or her mind, but by unspoken mutual consent none of them mentioned their observation. No one spoke and it seemed they would progress in complete silence until the man flung over his shoulder:

"My name is Joel. Doctor Joel. I am working on very important work and must not be disturbed. In fact, I do not *allow* myself to be disturbed. I do not admit any intrusion into my working life. You must understand it is merely because you are, or so you say, shipwrecked," he laughed suddenly, harshly, "and I understand it is common courtesy for those who dwell by the sea to give hospitality to those the sea has ill-treated, that you are here, within my garden. You are not, however, to expect to be treated as guests. I have neither the time nor the staff for the fancy side of life."

"That's all right, sir," they told him cheerfully. "In fact we will be on our way at once, if you like. We're not hurt in any way."

"No, no!" The man was unbarring a heavy door as he spoke, and the urgency in his tone warned them they had been invited inside only that he may further inspect them. "You must come in for a moment or two," he insisted.

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly." Jack could not resist the whisper, so that the others had to quickly stifle their giggles. Fortunately for them all Jack's words had been lost to Doctor Joel, since he was, at the same time, addressing someone so far unseen by the children.

"We have company, my friend," he boomed into the lighted hall. "Stoke up the fire and ring the bell three times. That will inform Laki he is to make refreshments. We require hot drinks and, I suggest, a few sandwiches."

The children and Adam pressed closely on the doctor's heels as he opened a door leading off from the hall and entered a large, lofty room. Jack caught back a whistle of surprise, but none of them could check their glances of astonishment as the figure of Mr. Arasim rose from a chair before a fire of blazing logs, thrusting several sheets of paper into the flames before he turned to face them, a gesture which plainly indicated the doctor's shout had been some form of warning. It seemed, however, that even their checked glances of astonishment had not escaped the doctor, for with a faint frown he glanced round the party then turned to Mr. Arasim.

"Do you know these children?" he demanded. "They appear to recognize you."

The tone was polite enough, as were the words, yet it seemed to the listeners there was more than a trace of threat behind them. They waited, tense and strangely uneasy, not certain of what to expect and prepared for almost anything. Mr. Arasim answered in a light tone, but there was that same sense of more lying behind his words than in the words themselves. The children and Adam could plainly see he was angered by the sight of them.

"They are the children from Red House," he told Doctor Joel. "The little man lives there, too. What are you doing here?" he spoke to them directly. "It is lucky I happened to discover my old friend Doctor Joel had bought this house and that he had a free half-hour to spare to-night so that we could meet and talk. Otherwise you may have got lost on your way home."

"It is indeed fortunate for us," Peter said gravely. "We've been fishing, but we shall not venture out like this again!" He gave a realistic shudder. "It is better to fish in daylight after all. Had we been swept into Nether Bay we should have all been drowned."

"What happened?" Mr. Arasim spoke in a voice as smooth as oil. "Did anything startle you?" He laughed. "Don't tell me you have seen this mysterious ghost-boat the taxi driver told me of? If you did, that would account for you losing your bearings, I suppose?" he ended.

"No," Peter gave a short laugh, aware that both men were watching them keenly. "Nothing so thrilling! I think we must have fouled the propeller on some seaweed. We felt a tug, then the thing stopped turning. Before we knew what had happened the undertow caught us and we hit the low rocks." He grinned ruefully: "I guess we're not as good sailors as we thought we were!"

"I see." Mr. Arasim appeared almost satisfied. "And your boat?" he asked next. "I suppose it sank?"

"No." Jack answered this time. "We pulled it on to a jutting-out piece of rock which looks like a shelf. We thought of asking Bill Stockton, a local fisherman, to come and fetch it off in the morning."

"Well, well!" Doctor Joel had not missed one word and now appeared to be completely satisfied with their story and their apparent fear of further accident. "I am sure we can help you there. My two men will repair the boat for you—it will give them something to do in the morning—and then they can bring it over to your boat-house. It will save me the worry of having your fisherman friend tramping about and probably ruining hours of peace and quiet which I need for my studies, and also it will prevent you worrying your grandfather at all."

The children thanked him and did not point out that Professor Bradley was Uncle John to two of them and a kind friend only to the others. A diversion was created at this moment as there came a tap on the door and a man opened it, stooping over a tea-wagon as he entered the room.

Like a panther springing up, Mr. Arasim was at the door and dismissed the man with a few whispered words, himself wheeling the wagon into the room. He made an excuse about the man being tired, glancing at the faces of the children and Adam as he spoke, but neither Adam nor Jack gave away by even the flicker of an eyelid the fact that they had recognized the man as the one who had driven over to Red House in the shooting brake. He was the man who had taken away Miss Lavender's kittens, and the pair wondered what on earth he was doing at High Cliff House.

Peter, who had his back to the door, had noticed nothing, neither had the two girls who had responded to Doctor Joel's invitation to come and sit beside the fire. As though all danger were now ended, Mr. Arasim appeared to relax. Doctor Joel asked Carol if she would pour out tea for them all, and left it to Ann to hand round the surprisingly good assortment of sandwiches and buns.

The atmosphere was friendly enough, but the children felt they were being plied with hidden questions and each felt uneasy, and anxious to get home. It was a relief to them all when Mr. Arasim glanced at his watch and remarked that the good Professor would be growing anxious about his charges—daring them to say Professor Bradley knew nothing of their being out at this time of night—and that they ought to start for home right away.

They set out as a party, Mr. Arasim between the two girls, Peter and Jack one on either side, and Adam bringing up the rear. The boys took good care to explain, in as casual a manner as possible, that they had gone night-fishing without asking the Professor's permission. Jack teasingly implied that if Mr. Arasim were to give them away it would be of little use for Doctor Joel to go

to the trouble of having their boat repaired and taken back to them. It was only by asking Bill Stockton to help them, Jack said, that they had hoped to keep their escapade secret.

"And as we've learned our lesson, that would spoil the holidays," Jack ended ruefully. "But we're sure you'll be a sport, sir."

"I won't tell. Your secret shall be safe with me," Mr. Arasim promised, following them into the kitchen and staring as Peter unlocked the door with a key. The man had not realized that while Jack held his attention Peter had swiftly removed the key Franks always left under a plant-pot on the window-ledge in case he ever forgot to take his own when he was out late at night. There was no danger of a stranger getting indoors in the normal way by means of this spare key, since Adam slept in the cubby-hole, as he termed it, which opened off the kitchen, and he was as light a sleeper as any trained watchdog.

"It must have been quite a change for him to get in at this hour without shinning up the drainpipe!" Jack remarked as Mr. Arasim went off to bed.

"Don't say anything about it just yet," Peter whispered. "He may be listening at the door." Aloud he said: "I should lock up now, Adam. We're all going to bed. I'm tired out, and I should think everyone else feels the same."

There was a strained silence as Peter spoke. For the first time the foursome realized Adam had not returned along with them. Instinctively they refrained from comment until Jack had crossed swiftly to the door, opened it sharply to make certain Mr. Arasim was nowhere within earshot, and closed it again. Then they faced one another, unspoken questions in the air.

"He was behind us at least half-way," Ann said softly.

"I know, because I kept hearing him mutter to himself, the way he does."

"We couldn't hear him after we started that argument about sea-urchins," Carol remembered, "and it was Adam who started it."

"Perhaps he did it so that you wouldn't be listening for him," Jack said slowly. "If I know him, Adam's all right. He must have some plan of his own, and we know he's jolly good at that sort of thing . . . looking after himself, I mean."

"He's better at it than ever now," Peter spoke as though to reassure them. "He tells me he spent the winter learning ju-jutsu and wrestling. It sounded a pretty fierce programme to me, but he said he wasn't going to find himself a victim of 'circumstancables,' as he put it, ever again."

The tension was relieved as they all laughed, finished their drinks and decided to go to bed. First, however, Jack went out of the window and replaced the key under the plant-pot so that Adam could enter when he was ready.

"Not that he *needs* a key," Carol remarked, remembering how Adam had scaled the walls of the house on other previous occasions. "It's simply that it looks better to come in that way."

With the thought that they had done all they could for their friend and the hope that his impetuous manner would not lead him into further trouble, the foursome went wearily to bed. They were very tired after their two nights of adventure, and in spite of all the excitement of the past few hours they were soon sound asleep.

As usual, Peter and Jack were awakened by Adam the following morning, an Adam whose grin stretched from ear to ear and whose whole body seemed to glow and indicate a secret excitement.

"Listen," he whispered as he set down the tray. "Adam go back to High Cliff House last night. Adam climb wall. Adam see into little glass house. Small black box there," he described it with his hands. "Knobs on box and many ring things. Then man who drove brake-car come. See Adam. Very angry. Man catch Adam. He say Doctor gone to bed and he put Adam in cellar until morning."

Adam's eyes gleamed with rage for a moment, as though the very memory of the indignity annoyed him. The boys wondered why he had not used his newly acquired knowledge of ju-jutsu and wrestling to defeat his captor, but Adam soon explained.

"Adam *let* man take him," he said with pride, "Adam wanted to see more of house. See lots more!" his eyes rolled expressively. "Lots!"

"Well, go *on*, then!" Jack urged, forgetting to eat his biscuits and drink his tea. "What happened next?"

"House has two cellars," Adam announced. "Man put Adam in big one. Adam act silly." He pulled a face, his eyes rolling so much that the boys wondered if he would ever see straight again. "Man give Adam big push and say, 'lie down, you'. He say doctor see me in morning. Adam lie down, man did not tie me up."

"Good show!" Peter broke in, "though how you held off from dotting him one, I can't imagine."

"That no way to learn things," Adam spoke reprovingly. "Adam wait. Man go away. Adam look round cellar. It light, like basement at this house, but with queer lights."

"Fluorescent lighting," Jack nodded. "Go on."

"Adam see big hole. Like shaft when Professor dig deep. Adam look down and see nothing, but can hear sea. Adam go to next cellar. It full of . . ." Adam paused and his face was a study of tantalization, "cat baskets," he

breathed. "Just like man bring in brake. Adam pick one up. No cats in these baskets. Go long passage from little cellar. Find what you call it . . . escape door? No? . . ."

"Emergency exit," Peter supplied. "Yes, then what?"

"Adam stand on mat. At once mat shoot in air. Adam almost fall. Mat, basket and Adam halt in glass place. Doctor man bending over black box. He not in bed. See Adam. Me run. Man shoot but not hit me. Adam run fast to home. Hide basement all night. Crept in house this morning. Basket in basement. You see after breakfast."

"You'd better hide out in the basement," Jack said thoughtfully. "Don't be seen about the place at all during the day. If we all pretend to worry about you then Mr. Arasim will think the doctor hit you when he fired. Then they will not know you ever reached us with your story."

"What about the Professor?" Jack asked as Adam was about to leave. "He's sure to worry if you're not about. He'd never rest if he thought anything had happened to you."

"I see Professor." Adam nodded his huge, ugly head. "Mr. Arasim go to sleep again after he had his tea. Franks take tea upstairs, but Adam make it. Mr. Arasim not wake for long time. Adam attend to that."

"He thinks of everything, doesn't he?" Peter said with admiration as the door closed behind Adam. "What do you make of all this, Jack? I don't like Adam being shot at. It might happen to any of us . . . and we have the girls to think about."

"Maybe the doctor is a rotten shot," Jack said comfortably. "Anyhow, he missed Adam. We'll just have to hope for the best. Personally I don't think I'd like to be a crook, and it's obvious Mr. Arasim and the doctor aren't

playing straight. They wouldn't be so secretive if they weren't up to something wrong! I'd rather be a fisherman and make a lot of money."

"Don't be an ass." Peter slapped his friend on the back as they made their way downstairs. "Fishing's a healthy life, but no money spinner."

"Why not?" Jack asked innocently. "It's all *net* profit!"

"You . . .!" Peter spluttered, a mixture of laughter and annoyance in his tone.

They were still laughing as they went into breakfast, and the Professor, seeing their happy faces, beaming round at Carol and Ann who were already seated, thought how splendid it was to have the young people with him once more. A frown creased his forehead as he thought of the conversation he had just held with Adam, and in his low voice he spoke to the children.

"Adam tells me there is certainly something strange going on over at High Cliff House," he began. "It seems our friend Mr. Arasim is mixed up in the business, whatever it may be. It also appears," his frown deepened as he glanced at the two girls, anxious not to frighten them but aware they must, in all fairness, be told of what had happened to Adam, "Adam was shot at last night, apparently by the man who calls himself Doctor Joel. A scientist demanding solitude he may be, but that does not give him the right to shoot people. What Adam was doing there I have no idea, although I daresay you people can enlighten me, but I will not press the point. Adam tells me he intends to 'disappear' for a few days, and in the meantime it will greatly please me if you four will keep as far from High Cliff House as possible during the remainder of your stay here. And now," he relaxed and forced a smile to his lips, "let us not be serious any longer."

"Yes," Ann agreed. "Let's find a lighter subject."

"The point now arises," Jack's eyes held the familiar twinkle so that Peter guessed he had some joke in mind, "what is a subject which can easily be made light of? I ask you?" he appealed to the others..

"Well," the Professor was beginning, evidently prepared to give the matter his serious consideration, but Peter began to laugh outright.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I think this is another of Jack's gags. He's just had me nicely, but I think I can answer this one. You say . . ." he turned to Jack, "what is a subject one can easily make light of? Gas!"

"Right first time," Jack laughed. "You're improving, Peter," and the Professor relaxed, realizing this was the beginning of one of those lighthearted, good-natured conversations he so enjoyed hearing, and it was good to see the grim tension wiped from the faces of the girls.

No sooner was breakfast over, however, than the four made their way to the basement, finding Adam already there, just as they had expected. He was poking diligently at the lining of the captured cat-basket, and Ann sprang forward at once.

"Don't, Adam!" she said sharply, making a move to take the object from him, a move which Adam defeated in one movement. "If you're not careful you'll spoil the thing altogether!"

Adam gave a grunt which sounded like one of satisfaction, then before their astonished eyes he held up the complete lining which had obviously been made detachable and was lined on the reverse side by a series of small, chamois bags. Altogether it was a most ingenious affair and it was evident quite a lot of thought had been given over to its invention.

"See!" Adam held out the lining for inspection. "What

so small it could go in there?" he asked. "Something important."

"I don't know," Peter said slowly, considering the lining carefully. "A number of things, I suppose. Plans, if they were written in sections and on rice paper. According to the thriller writers spies and so forth do things like that. Papers of any kind could be made to fit, I suppose or . . . I just don't know."

"Dope could." Jack was off on a favourite topic. "I saw a film once with that sort of thing in it, but it was inside a man's hat lining . . ."

"What was?" Carol asked.

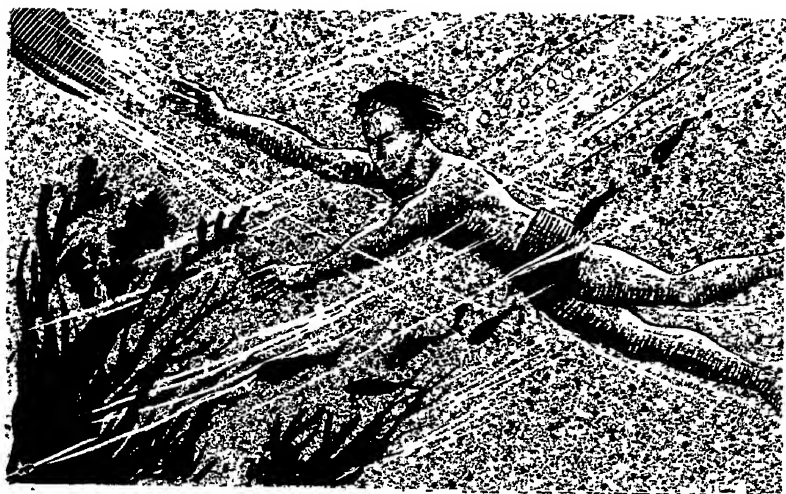
"The dope, silly," her brother answered impatiently. "But we don't know about this. As Peter says, it could be anything small and secret."

"We'd better hide this." Peter gestured towards the ruined basket. "Let's hope they have so many they don't miss one. Somehow we've got to keep searching until we find one with something in its lining. At least we have a clue now."

After a great deal of discussion as to the best hiding place it was agreed to take up the floor boards and to put the basket into the cavity which represented the roof of the coal cellar of Red House.

"And now," Ann demanded when this was done. "What next?"

"To-night," Adam said slowly, "Adam go back to house. To-night you watch from sea again. Try follow what mysterious object does. Adam try from inside house. Now Adam get sleep ready for to-night."



CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND CODED MESSAGE

PROFESSOR Bradley sat alone at the breakfast table after the children had departed to their basement hideout. He was smoking his pipe and thinking over what Adam had said to him earlier that morning. Until a year ago, when a gang of crooks had attempted to steal the valuable papyrus on which he was working at the time, the Professor had realized almost nothing of the outside world.

"You must get Mr. Arasim away from the house all to-day, sir."

The Professor remembered Adam's insistence on this point and wondered how he could achieve what the little man so earnestly desired. As he toyed with his letters he pondered the problem. Suddenly an idea struck him and he rang for Franks, ordering the car to be ready as soon as Mr. Arasim was awake and downstairs.

It was almost lunchtime before the would-be student

emerged from his room. He was still heavy-eyed and very apologetic, but the Professor made light of his apologies, saying a number of people found the air very relaxing and were overcome by a desire for sleep after a day or two in this area.

The Professor and Mr. Arasim enjoyed an excellent lunch together, and towards the end of the meal the Professor casually remarked that he had arranged a "treat" for the student.

"I am expecting some valuable pieces to arrive this afternoon," he said. "I know they will have been carefully packed and will arrive safely at the station. It is the delivery from there to Red House which invariably causes the damage. There is excuse enough, goodness knows, in the condition of our local roads, but this time I have arranged to pick them up myself and thought you would be interested in seeing how they are packed to travel and so on. We leave in about ten minutes."

If Mr. Arasim had plans of his own there was no time for him to put forth any reasonable claims for them. He made no audible protest to the Professor, however, but with a diffident smile he allowed himself to be whisked away from the house.

Perhaps the Professor would not have felt so satisfied with himself had he been able to overhear Adam who, awakening punctually at half-past two, asked the children to make certain Mr. Arasim had left the house for the day and, if he had, to remain close enough to take in any parcels which may arrive for the student.

It was not long afterwards that the shooting brake arrived again. It was the same vehicle as before, but this time there was a different driver at the wheel. The man was as surly as the other one had been, and after asking for Mr. Arasim and being told he was out, seemed inclined

to go away without saying anything further. It was at that moment that Franks fortunately appeared, his quiet manner evidently impressing the driver of the brake.

"Is there anything I can do, sir?" Franks asked respectfully. "May I be of assistance in any way?"

"Yes," the man nodded, his tone ungracious. Sullenly he began to unload six cat-baskets from the brake. "See that these cat-baskets are *personally* delivered to Mr. Arasim. These things cost a great deal of money and have to be handled with care. They must not be knocked about. Understand?"

"I will attend to the matter myself," Franks assured him, "and will put the baskets straight into Mr. Arasim's room."

The man watched him as Franks picked up one of the baskets as though it were made of fine glass and might easily break. His exaggerated care evidently impressed the driver, for he grunted an ungracious "Thanks, chum," as he placed the last basket on the ground. At a nod from Peter the foursome wandered off as though no longer interested. Not until the brake had gone did they return to the house to find Franks awaiting them in the hall.

"I don't know what your friend Adam is up to now," Franks grumbled, "but he told me these things would arrive to-day and to tell you to examine them. You had better be quick about it."

"Thanks, Franks," Peter said as he led the way upstairs.

They examined the baskets carefully, discovering that each one had the detachable lining Adam had already discovered in the one he had stolen. The boys unpicked the linings and handed the baskets to the girls to make, as Jack phrased it, "as good as new again." They had examined four of the six without undue excitement, then, as they worked on the fifth, Jack gave a cry.

"There's something here!" he announced. "Careful, Peter!"

The "something" proved to be a thin piece of paper carefully folded. When Peter unfolded it they discovered another coded message.

"Quick. Read it out carefully. I'll make a copy. We can translate it later. We know now how the code works."

Slowly and carefully Jack read out the letters and figures.

"TF5TRT WF1O BYGF 6TB7 BZAMF3QHB3XM QFF2F GB6 GUCHF 9QJB4 QHF3MRHO."

"I've got it," Peter checked quickly and then folded the paper back carefully before replacing it in its hiding place. The girls hastily finished off the lining of the basket, then the foursome hastened away from Mr. Arasim's room, thankful to have accomplished so much without interruption.

Adam was waiting for them in the basement, and at once they set to work to decode the new message.

"Remember," Jack chuckled, "what should go forwards goes backwards, and vice versa."

"T O M O R . . . back 1," Peter said. "Not forwards. That gives us N. Then A X F E . . . it's not making sense."

They tried repeatedly, but each time they encountered the F 1 the result was the same until Carol asked:

"Need it be F 1? I mean, couldn't it be F 10 . . . back 10?"

"Maybe," Jack said slowly. "Let's try it that way and see."

"T O M O R R O W (back 6)" wrote Peter as Jack spelled out the letters. "N (forward 7) I G H T (back 3) N E (forward 3) A P T I (back 2) D E (forward 6) M A I N (back 9) H A (forward 4) U L (back 3) J O E L."

"To-morrow night neap tide main haul. Signed Joel," Peter read excitedly. "We have only to-night to discover how whatever it is gets wherever it goes, what it is and why it's important, and then to-morrow we can try and catch them redhanded or get the coastguards to help if it looks like being too much for us alone."

"Quite a nice, neat, easy little programme," Jack grinned. "So far all we know is to expect a haul of we know not what, and that the neap tide is due. Not a great deal to go on, when you come to think about it."

"Whatever it is it must be small," Ann observed. "Otherwise it wouldn't fit into the cat-baskets. I don't think they are *all* made with these special linings just on the chance of putting a message in one of them."

"Whatever it is had to have some connection with glass, too," Carol contributed. "Remember that first message? 'Found safe method to dispatch glass. Must see you. Arasim.' Somehow I can't see much glass being fitted into these baskets, although it is obvious this is the method to which he referred."

"Or being buffeted about by the waves," Peter said thoughtfully. "It must be very special or valuable glass anyhow, to cause all these elaborate precautions to be taken for its safety. Maybe it's some new kind of unbreakable glass . . ."

"Adam have idea," announced the little man suddenly. "Are not some precious gems sometimes called glass? Yes?"

"Diamonds!" Peter and Jack said the word in chorus, their tones full of awe. "I believe you've hit on it, Adam, old man," Peter went on warmly. "We've stumbled on a nest of diamond smugglers. I read about such a gang once, ages ago, in the newspaper. They make their money by avoiding the customs or duties or whatever it is they should pay, and then they sell their diamonds illicitly."

"Phew!" Jack sat down to the danger of one of their home-made chairs. "If that's the case we're up against people both desperate *and* serious. These fellows are not likely to give up easily, and if Adam's guess is right they will have too much at stake to care what risks they run. And we cannot do anything until we have more proof."

"We'll get the proof hard enough," Peter said grimly. "Adam says he is going back to High Cliff House to-night. Well, we're going out to watch for that mysterious object again. When it submerges I'm going to follow it. Shut up, Ann," he said with brotherly rudeness as his sister began to protest. "It's the only way to find out what we want to know. I shall not be soft enough to dive head first into the water and hit a rock. I suggest we don't take the *Adventurer* out to-night. Let's go on foot to as near where we ran aground as we can. I'll swim out as soon as it's low water. I'll play around the Fangs, and as soon as whatever it is comes through, I'll be after it. It's bound to go on to some destination, and I'll bet that little light glows to the bitter end. I'll risk it, anyhow, and try to find out."

"Well, if you must you must, I suppose," Ann sighed, "but for goodness sake be careful! And don't forget to rub yourself all over with olive oil before we leave the house. It'll be cold fooling about there, even in summer, at that hour of the night."

"That brings us to another point," Jack observed. "We don't even know whether the Joel bloke has returned the *Adventurer* or not. It's all very well our making plans, but if he and old Hair-Oil have still got our boat we've lost our chance of being on hand to-morrow, on what appears to be the Big Night of the whole affair."

"We'll go and find out about the boat first." Peter rose, putting the decoded message carefully away.

The *Adventurer* was, as Doctor Joel had promised, repaired and tied up beside the boat-house. The children were surprised and pleased, until Jack caught sight of the folded paper pinned close to the engine. He took it down, unfolded the paper and read aloud:

"Here is your boat as I promised. See to it that in future you do not sail in troubled waters. Doctor Joel."

"Apparently he *can* write in plain English as well as in code," Jack remarked, laughing as he handed the note round for the others to read. "Bother him! Who does he imagine he is to be issuing orders to us? It's a free country, and sea too, I presume! He can't stop us sailing if we want to!"

"We'll go fishing this afternoon, anyhow," Peter suggested. "That will give us a chance to look round a little and to have the boat beached and everything in daylight. If they are keeping a watch on us, which we must expect, they will think we have finished with the boat until to-morrow. And rightly, too," he chuckled.

They spent a happy time on the water, returning to Red House to learn from Franks that Mr. Arasim had been for "a very long walk."

"He looked absolutely exhausted when he went up to his room," Franks reported.

Mr. Arasim, it seemed, had remained in his room for some time then gone to the kitchen to ask Franks to take him to fetch the next batch of kittens from Miss Lavender.

"Have they gone, Franks?" Jack asked eagerly. "In those baskets the man brought to-day?"

"Yes," Franks told them. "Mr. Arasim seemed very interested in the baskets. He wanted to know at what time they arrived, where you all were when the man brought them, and whether or not any of you had seen them arrive. He seemed satisfied when I told him that

I had attended to the man with the baskets myself and had personally carried them up to his room. I said that you were all somewhere in the grounds or on the beach. He must have been pleased," his eyes twinkled, "because he gave me a pound note."

"Lucky you, Franks!" Jack grinned, "but it all sounds fishy, don't you think so?"

"Fishy enough for me to tell you youngsters that if there's anything queer going off I don't intend to be kept out of it," Franks informed them, laughing. "That Adam has some mischief or other up his sleeve. Well, I'm not an old man yet and I might see a bit farther than you young people, so I'd like to be in on it all, just in case there's danger."

"Carol and Ann will tell you all about it in the morning," Peter promised. "We haven't much to go on at the moment, but we hope to have after to-night."

"Well, don't leave it too late to let me in on the fun!" Franks warned them, smiling as they gave him their assurance before going off for tea.

Adam disappeared soon after dusk. The foursome settled down in the basement, the two girls working on Ann's collection of pressed flowers, leaving Peter and Jack to settle the plan of action as they thought best. They went into the house for supper about half an hour before their usual time, to be told by the Professor that Mr. Arasim had seemed very worried about Adam. The pretending student, it appeared, had announced he did not feel well and had gone early to bed. According to his story he had walked too far that afternoon, but it was plain that neither the Professor nor the children believed him.

"I wish," Professor Bradley said wistfully as they bade him good night, "you would tell me whatever it is you

have reason to suppose is taking place. I would rather like to be in on the fun myself, as well as having a natural desire to make certain you are in no danger!"

"You should be ashamed of yourself, sir!" Jack teased him. "You and Franks are quite a pair. You both think you should be in at everything! Shall we show your uncle the second message now, Peter?"

"If you like." Peter was not too enthusiastic. He did not want to see the elderly Professor in any danger. "Here you are, sir," he held out the paper. "That's what we make it out to be."

The Professor studied the message, both coded and translated, and evidently he agreed with their findings for he nodded. He thought it wiser to say nothing to the foursome of his own faculty of memorizing any written paper within a matter of minutes. It was a trick he had mastered during his days as a student, when it had helped him greatly, his particular brand of studies calling for the memorizing of long lists of awkward names. Fortunately it had proved a habit which, once formed, was hard to lose and it may, he told himself, prove useful at the present time.

"I wish I could find one of these things," he said so plaintively that Peter laughed outright. "But I don't know where to look!"

"Maybe it's just as well, sir," Jack answered for them all. "You once told us 'curiosity killed the cat,' remember?"

"I do. Off to bed with you! At least I can rest assured that for to-night you will not be up to mischief! I take it that 'to-morrow night' in this message really *does* refer to to-morrow night and not to-night?"

Having reassured the elderly scholar on this point the children escaped to bed, but the knowledge that they had

kept the Professor in ignorance of their plans for that night and so were partially deceiving him, made them feel more than a little uncomfortable.

The time passed very slowly. Low water was not until two minutes off midnight, and the foursome were very sleepy. It was agreed Peter needed rest the most, since he was the one whose task it would be to attempt to follow their objective, and this, they knew, would require a great output of energy and strength. Accordingly Jack was entrusted to see that his friend was awake in time for them to make their stealthy way to the base of High Cliff.

The moon did not afford much light, and the coastline seemed an impenetrable wall of darkness as they literally crept along.

They reached their objective, a fairly broad ledge of rock, with time to spare, then made themselves as comfortable as they could on the hard rocks and damp, strong-smelling seaweed. Peter felt unbearably sticky. He had agreed to Ann's suggestion and applied olive oil liberally to his body. It would, he reflected, be almost entirely absorbed by his clothes long before he went into the water, but that could not be helped.

With ten minutes to spare he slipped off his outer garments and, clad as he was in just his bathing trunks, he shivered for a moment in the chill night air. Ann pushed a small bottle into his hand, an action which made Peter grin to himself in the darkness. It was so like his sister to have brought along an extra supply of olive oil without saying a word to anyone. He rubbed briskly, then prepared to slip into the water, conscious of the whispers urging "good luck" and "be careful" as he left his sister and friends.

Peter swam out about twenty-five yards, as closely as he could estimate. He knew the Fangs were just fifty yards

from the cliff base, and not wishing to be struck by whatever the mysterious missile may prove to be, he judged it better to place himself in such a position that he could watch its approach, keeping himself outside the direct line of "fire." He found a further difficulty in the pull of the water around the base of the cliffs. He kept his face turned towards the open sea, glad of his dark mop of hair which would not show up well against the heaving water. Soon there was the now familiar sound of the aircraft approaching the coastline, and Peter nerved himself to keep a keen look-out for whatever it was that came through the gap in the Fangs.

In actual time he had not long to wait, but to Peter it seemed that hours must have gone by between the first sound of the engine of the aircraft and the sight of what appeared to him as a model light-weight craft. It was moving reasonably fast and, so far as he could observe, it was approximately four feet in length. His guess as to the structure of the object had been, he realized, fairly correct, since he could now see that the thing was built in a similar fashion to a miniature submarine and carried a small light on what looked like a periscope about three feet high. It was by now advancing towards him.

Peter's reason told him that the craft, however constructed, was reasonably faster than the *Adventurer*, but not so fast as he and the others had believed. It came on towards him and he watched it as though fascinated, a joyful sense of triumph filling his heart as he saw the thing begin to submerge and knew their conjecture had been correct. It was within a yard or so of the boy when the light itself vanished under water. Taking a deep breath and summoning all his courage, Peter turned over in the water like a seal and followed the craft to the depths.

way round the cave. Presumably this had been done in order that anyone coming to attend to the machinery would have somewhere dry to stand or walk. Peter swam to the side of the cave and pulled himself up on to one of the ledges. At least this would, he told himself, give him the opportunity for a few minutes of well-deserved rest and at the same time he could look around and take stock of all he may be able to observe.

The shaft, which had obviously been cut into the well of the cliff, was at the far end of the cave. Resting and thinking back over all the lectures he had heard on electricity and radio-impulse control during science lessons at school, Peter tried to guess how the whole thing worked.

It was fairly evident the craft must have struck some kind of electrically padded spring, thus setting in motion the underwater lift by automatic control. Judging by the distance he had followed the craft and realizing the shaft must have an outlet somewhere, Peter remembered Adam's story of the shaft in the cellar of High Cliff House. The memory of Adam's words, that he could see nothing but could hear the sound of the sea, added to the facts he had learned during this past hour or so, almost proved the entrance to the shaft to be the one which terminated in the cellar where Adam had been left as prisoner.

"It's a clever idea," Peter thought in genuine admiration. "These men must make pots of money at this game. They wouldn't go to all this trouble and expense, to say nothing of the risks they run, if the profits were small. This little lot must have cost the better part of a small fortune."

He sat a few moments longer, resting and thinking over all he had seen and all he had guessed at, but conscious all the time that Ann and the others would be anxious about him. The prospect of the return journey with not

even the faint light of the craft to guide him, was anything but alluring. Yet he could not stay in the cave indefinitely, and there was apparently no other means of exit save the lift shaft, therefore the journey would *have* to be made!

Carefully thinking back, Peter came to the conclusion he had travelled approximately twenty-five yards underwater at a depth of about six feet. He found the idea did not seem so dreadful when he thought of the journey in this way. He decided he must think of the school baths and imagine he was swimming there at night-time and that all the lights were out!

The return journey was all he had feared. There was no longer the thrill of the chase to urge him on, there was no guiding light ahead, no sense of overwhelming curiosity. There was, however, the same pain in his chest and in his head, a pain now intensified by this second trip. He endured the same soreness in his eyes and the same feeling of near-panic that he would not be able to surface successfully. At last, when he judged the distance was safe, he felt his way cautiously to the surface.

He came up slowly, feeling for dangers lurking ahead. It was with deep thankfulness he at last lifted his head from the water and saw the black bulk of the cliff against the darkness of the night.

He expended his first breath taken in the fresh air in a tiny whistle and was immediately rewarded by hearing it repeated, knowing the answering signal came from Jack. Peter swam towards the base of the cliff where the willing hands of the girls and Jack reached out to help him over the slippery rocks. He was thankful for the rough towel Jack had carried wound round his waist, for the quick rub down and the comfort of being once more on land and in the fresh air.

"Don't talk now," Jack whispered. "There's a sort of patrol out. The driver bloke has been along the bay shingle once and I think he is still lurking around somewhere. Save what you have to tell us until we get back to the basement, unless, of course, there is anything we can do right now."

"Nothing," Peter said firmly. "Let's get back."

The return journey to the basement of Red House was made in complete silence. Once safely inside and the door closed, Peter lost no time in telling them all that had happened, from the moment he followed the strange craft under water to the second he saw it whisked out of sight. They were all amazed, but very pleased the evidence appeared to bear out their theory. The thing which remained to be done as quickly as possible was to obtain the necessary proof that the "glass" mentioned in the first message was really diamonds, something of which the foursome were almost certain, but, as Jack remarked, had to prove before they could go to anyone in authority. Carol was, as usual, busy at the stove. She was making cocoa, knowing they all required some warm stimulant after their long exposure to the cold night air.

"I wonder how Adam went on," she remarked as she brought the cups to the table. "It seems funny to be making a cup short. I shall be glad when he's back."

As she spoke the door opened and the little misshapen man slipped into the room. He was breathing heavily, but there was a triumphant gleam in his eyes and he nodded grateful thanks to Carol as she offered him her own cup, saying she would make another one for herself.

"What did you find, Adam?" Jack asked. "Anything interesting?"

"Plenty." Adam drained his cup and leaned forward. "Adam creep right round house. Counted on fact we not

suspected. Only doctor man Joel and two servant men there. No Mr. Arasim. Creep to front. Find porch with flat roof. Roof hang over porch all round but Adam could not reach from sides. Stood on wall and tried jump. Adam lucky. Landed on edge of porch with fingers. Adam cling tight. Begin to swing like pendulum in Professor Bradley's grandfather clock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Just like that. Side to side."

"Well," Jack urged, not insensible to the drama of the situation but anxious to know what happened next. "Did you get in?"

"Adam climb on roof," Adam said reproachfully, since he liked best to tell his stories in his own slow, deliberate way. "No windows open, not till reach attic. Adam get in there. Strange things in attic. Bits of machines. All sorts of things. Through skylight Adam see Joel and one servant in glass place. Driver man in kitchen. Adam creep down and to cellar where man put him first time he go to house. Adam hide on top of old cupboard at far end of cellar. Adam guess," he said with pride, "shaft used for something when strange object arrive."

"And it was, wasn't it, Adam?" Peter demanded excitedly. "I saw the thing go up, and I wondered if you would be able to find out what happened when it reached the other end."

"Thing like small boat come up shaft on lift," Adam nodded. "When it arrive Mr. Arasim and one servant there. They break up small boat. Seems made of light wood. They take out machine bits like those in attic. Then they take out small leather bags. Open bags. Arasim say loudly what fine diamonds. He very excited."

"Great work!" Peter breathed. "And then?"

"Adam hear Mr. Arasim say test worked right. Baskets sent to Red House not been touched." Adam chuckled.

'Message arrive all right,' Arasim say. 'Those children not so smart after all.' That's all he knows!" he added darkly.

"Yes," Ann urged. "Go on."

"Adam hear Arasim say now diamonds go to Red House in baskets. Then go straight to London along with kittens. Big haul to-morrow night. Then they . . . pull out, I think he say."

"Wonderful." Jack gave Adam a whack on the back which would have shaken anyone less solid. "How did you get away, old man?"

"Getting out of house easy," Adam said, "then make mistake. Crossed beam of light. Joel man see Adam. They all come out, but Adam get away."

"Bad luck," Jack said regretfully, "but it couldn't be helped. You did marvellously well, we all think so, but their seeing you explains the patrol they had out."

"It also means they will realize we suspect them," Peter added.

"Yes," Ann made her contribution thoughtfully, "but I bet they have to go ahead with their plans, just the same. They will not be able to stop whatever organization they have over the sea just like that. Even if they have a secret radio transmitter it may be just as dangerous to have things halted and their diamonds held up on one side of the water as on the other. I should think a job like this has to be well planned months ahead. They will just have to go on and hope for the best, but now they'll be prepared to shoot their way out if necessary. We ought to warn the coastguards . . ."

"And have them laugh at us?" Jack cut in. "We'll tell them just before it's time for anything to happen, don't you agree, Peter? Then they *may* come. If we give them time to think it over it will all sound too screwy for words. They'll not believe us."

"I think you're right," Peter said slowly. "And there is another point. We know the gang will be on their guard. They don't know how much *we* know! We're not even certain they are sure the intruder was Adam. But the fact remains we have to be extra careful from now onwards. As Jack says, desperate men will take desperate measures. You two girls remember that! We may or may not be in danger, but I think we should take all extra precautions, just in case we are!"

"We know all that," Jack said impatiently. "Any ideas? I vote the girls go for the coastguards just as we go up to the house and try surprise tactics. We *did* promise the Professor and Franks that if there was anything going off they should take a part, but I cannot see how they will fit into this."

"It would, perhaps, be better if the girls were to tell Uncle John and Franks before they go to the coastguards," Peter suggested. "Then Franks can drive them all over to the coastguards' hut and we shall feel sure the girls are safe. The coastguards will listen to Uncle John without laughing at him, that is certain, and he knows enough about this affair to realize we would not worry the coastguards unless we were certain this matter is serious. Jack, Adam and myself can form the advance storming party, though what or whom we hope to storm I cannot say until we get there."

"Sounds O.K. to me," Jack stretched himself. "If we're all agreed I suggest we go to bed! Goodness knows I'm tired enough. Peter must feel absolutely whacked after all his efforts, and Adam too. It sounds very unlikely that we'll get much sleep to-morrow night, so I think we ought to snatch a little in advance if we possibly can."

Peter, who knew well enough how he would feel had Jack's running powers been the great thing to forward

their investigation, took no special credit for his swimming. He flung a consoling arm across his chum's shoulders as they made their way out.

"Don't worry, Jack" he said good-humouredly. "You'll probably be the one to save the day as you did last year. But for you running for help at the last minute our adventure would not have had a very happy ending! Swimming isn't much use when it comes to people chasing you! There aren't many of them want to do that sort of thing in the sea, without a boat!"

There was general, subdued laughter, then the four-some made their way to bed, leaving Adam in the kitchen as usual.

Despite his long swim and the lateness of the hour, Peter found it difficult to get to sleep. He tossed and turned, worried by a feeling of approaching disaster, a feeling which refused to be shaken off, no matter how many times he told himself everything was under control and was bound to turn out right in the end. At length Jack became so annoyed by his companion's restless movements he threatened to go downstairs and sleep with Adam in the kitchen unless the other occupant of the room "piped down."

"I'm sorry," Peter apologized, "but I can't help my bed creaking every time I move. I'll try to lie still now."

It seemed he had barely uttered the words when he was wakened by Adam shaking his shoulder.

"What's happened?" Peter demanded, not thoroughly awake. "I've only just gone to sleep!"

"Even if you go to sleep late you sleep for hours," Adam almost snapped. His manner was so unusual that both boys were literally shocked into wakefulness. "It is morning . . . I let you sleep late . . . and now something dreadful has happened," his English became even

more odd as his agitation grew. "Read this," he demanded and thrust a piece of paper into Peter's hand.

"I have taken your sisters to High Cliff House," they read. "So no one knows where they are but yourselves. If you keep quiet about what you know they will be safe enough. We leave to-night. They will be left at High Cliff House unharmed. There is one condition for their safety. *You must not tell what your funny little man has discovered.* If you tell, then you will never see your sisters again. Be wise and keep silent, then all will be well. Arasim."

"Where did you find this?" Peter asked, his face white with anxiety.

"On Miss Ann's pillow," Adam said sorrowfully. "Adam hear nothing in night. Arasim must have used front door. What do now?"

"I don't know." Peter spoke slowly. "We must think, though how they got them out without making a sound—without someone hearing sounds of a struggle or a call for help—that puzzles me."

"Room he smell sweet," Adam said. "Like when Miss Carol she fix her beetles and she tell Adam not to sniff."

"Chloroform!" Jack whistled. "Come on, Peter. Let's get dressed. We'll have to plan as we go, but this shows they'll not stop at anything. We mustn't tell your uncle *yet!* Let's say the girls have gone for an early morning ramble, then we'll set to work to find out how best to free them. There's bound to be *some* way, if we can only settle to think! Then we've got to find out how to get even with those blighters as well!"



CHAPTER IX

PRISONERS

ANN struggled to awaken from what had been an exceptionally horrid dream. She tried desperately to sit up, feeling terribly sick with every movement. She pressed her hand to her aching head as she struggled determinedly to a sitting position, wondering where she was and what had happened to make her feel so ill. She made a great effort mentally, willing herself not to give way to the dreadful waves of nausea which swept over her, one after the other. Suddenly her vision cleared sufficiently for her to become aware she was lying on a settee in a room which was vaguely familiar, and that on another similar settee, at the opposite end of the room, Carol lay, just beginning to stir.

"Good morning. Drink this. It will stop you feeling sick."

"Oh!"

To save her life Ann could not have kept back that exclamation of horror as she turned in the direction of the voice and saw Doctor Joel leaning towards her, a glass of liquid in his outstretched hand.

"Why are we here?" she demanded more boldly than she felt. She was suddenly very frightened and strove gallantly to hide her fear. "Where are the boys?"

Doctor Joel's attention was diverted for a moment as Carol, moaning, tried to sit up. In a quick movement the doctor had turned and picked up a second glass which he held out to the other girl, Ann having accepted hers, reluctantly, when Carol first made an attempt to sit up.

"I asked you a question, doctor. Why are we here?"

"And how did we get here?" Carol demanded. "I don't remember . . ."

"Mr. Arasim brought you here," Doctor Joel said calmly. "He was acting under my orders. I don't know what you youngsters imagine has been going on in and around this house, but I must point out to you that I have been working for some time on very important work. You will remember I told you this on the night your boat was wrecked, but I fear you children have no respect for a man who only wishes to be left in peace to carry out the task he has set himself. The result of my efforts is to be tested to-night, and I cannot risk having my work ruined by a pack of inquisitive children and a little man who ought to be in a side-show at a fair."

"Sneering at Adam won't do you any good," Carol was beginning, but Ann, fearful of what she may say next, knowing only too well Carol's impulsive, hot temper, interrupted. She hoped desperately that her words would remind her friend that the foursome had decided the gang really did not know their activities were suspect and that they must not be allowed to guess even now.

"What has Mr. Arasim to do with us?" she asked in her best Form Captain manner. "He is a guest in my uncle's house. We have not interfered with him. He should not act in this way towards us without some explanation. Tell us what we are supposed to have done which may cause you trouble or bring your work to disaster!"

This unexpected counter-attack appeared to stun Doctor Joel for the moment. He fixed the staring gaze of his blue eyes on Ann as though hoping to disconcert her, but the girl's glance did not waver and after a moment he looked away.

"So far as we know," he admitted, "you have not *done* anything, but your misshapen little friend was wandering round here last night, and goodness knows what damage he might do were he to interfere further."

"Adam?" Ann's voice was full of scorn and she was thankful Adam could not hear her words. "What on earth do you think *he* can do?" she demanded. "Uncle keeps him around the house because he is sorry for him, because no one will employ him. And when we are here we have him with us. He is able to bait the hook when we go fishing. He can carry baskets for picnics, all sorts of things like that, but as for anything requiring thought or *knowing* about anything more important than fishing and so on, well . . ."

The shrug of her shoulders was enough to indicate that she apparently considered Adam of a very low order of intelligence. She felt unspeakably disloyal to the little man in saying these things, but she knew Adam would approve, if he ever had to be told. Yet although he appeared to accept this theory, to the dismay of both girls, Doctor Joel spoke with a firmness they had not anticipated.

"That may be so. Whether you are speaking the truth or not I have no means of discovering, and as my work is too costly and of too great an importance to allow you or your friend to upset it in any way, I have taken steps to make certain we shall not be interrupted during the final stages."

"You mean . . . Jack and Peter are prisoners too?" Carol asked.

"No," Doctor Joel smiled, a smile without warmth. "Mr. Arasim left a note which informed your brothers what would happen to you both if they attempted any further . . . investigations!" he said smoothly. "I assume your brothers are fond of you. So they should be. My own sister is devoted to me. If they *are* fond of you they will mind their own business a little while longer. After to-night we shall go away, leaving you both here, safe and sound, so that your brothers can find you and take you home."

"And if they don't . . . mind their own business?" Carol put in.

"Then I regret we shall have to take drastic steps, a fact of importance with which they are already acquainted. We have warned them that if they interfere they will never see either of you again. *Whatever* they do our work will be carried out; matters have been arranged which do not permit a change of plan so late in the day. If they cause trouble . . . there's a slow fuse leading from the top of the steps which descend to the cellar. It leads in turn to a charge of explosive *underneath* part of the cellar floor. We shall, I trust, remain in your memories as not too unpleasant a group of people, and unless there is trouble we shall not do you any harm. However, at the moment when our final tests are to begin, I am afraid we shall have to tie you both up securely. In the event of

your brothers failing to be wise, the fuse will be lit, and you will be unable to escape, and deeply as we regret this, you and High Cliff House will vanish together in a blaze of glory."

Until he spoke the last few words the girls had not been quite without hope of rescue. Now, with the quietly spoken but threatening words ringing in their ears, they felt suddenly cold, frozen with horror. Ann was the first to break the silence, hoping desperately her voice would not give away her real feelings.

"You fiend," she said in a fierce, low tone. "You cannot seriously believe you will get away with this? People cannot go around issuing threats to ordinary citizens, much less *carry out* any threat they may make."

"That will do." Doctor Joel looked bored, as though he had heard more than he could bear of the conversation. "I will have food sent in to you," he rose as he spoke and went to the door. "You will not be allowed to leave this room until after we have gone. The method by which you *do* leave is in the hands of your brothers. If you require water for washing purposes there is a small wash-room through that far door. There is no way out, and it would be useless to attempt to find one. Try to make yourselves comfortable. There are magazines and books in the bookcase over there. You may read them or not, as you will."

"Well!" Carol began as the door closed quietly behind Doctor Joel, "I think that's the limit. Look here, can't we . . ."

She stopped as Ann pulled a piece of paper and a pencil from her coat pocket, Ann inwardly thanking her stars Arasim had been sufficiently considerate-as to wrap a coat around each of them before abducting them to High Cliff House. Scribbling furiously on the piece of

paper before handing it to Carol, Ann kept up a chant of nonsensical songs which totally drowned the sound of her friend's voice. She was still singing, but not quite so loudly, as Carol began to read what she had written. As she read, Carol's cheeks burned crimson as she realized Ann was trying to think one "jump ahead" of the gang whose prisoners they were.

"Don't talk," Ann had written. "They may have concealed mikes."

After that there seemed to be little chance of their being able to discuss anything at all. They sat in silence for a time until Carol began to talk nervously of her latest cooking experiments. They had managed only a few words before the sullen man they had heard referred to as Laki came in with a trolley full of good things to eat, steaming cups of tea and a box of sweets. The girls pretended to be pleased and sat down together to make as good a breakfast as they could.

It was as they were eating that Carol hit upon the idea of using the books as a means of communication. They each took a book, began reading and then, as they wanted to speak to one another, pointed out the required words one by one from the printed pages. It was a slow method, and as several of the words they wanted such as "prisoners," "escaping" and one or two others were not easily found, it became quite an exciting game and helped to while away the time as well as giving them a means of discussion. Most important of all, it kept them both from wondering and worrying *too* much about the boys.

For the boys themselves there was no such diversion. At Red House plan after plan had been discussed but no one had yet found any foolproof way of rescuing the two girls, since no one knew whereabouts in High Cliff House they were being held prisoners.

"Adam sick of this," that worthy announced after a time. "Adam go scout round again if Peter and Jack agree."

"No," Peter spoke for them both, knowing how Jack felt about Carol. "We'd rather you didn't, old chap," he said as gently as he could. "You're a marked man now, and you've done good work already. It will be far better if we let them think they have beaten us, at least for the moment. But whatever happens I vote we all work together on this, and," Peter's tone was grim, "we'll get the girls back unharmed!"

"If only we could let the Professor and Franks know without them dashing off and doing something drastic, like getting the coastguards on the job," Jack said miserably. "We're tied . . ."

"We can," Adam said, suddenly joyful. "Adam have plan. Listen, Professor he always have hot drink last thing at night. Franks come back to kitchen and make it often after Adam gone to bed. Professor *always* have malted milk drink made from stuff in tall green tin on shelf. You write note for Franks. Put note in tin. Franks finds it when he make drink. Not too late, not too soon. Just right."

"Sounds all right if it works," Jack commented. "So long as this is the one night the Professor doesn't decide to do *without* his drink!"

"Professor *always* have this drink," Adam insisted. "Say he not sleep without it. Adam often hear him say that. He changed in many ways since you here last year, but he keeps *some* old habits. This one he never miss."

"It's the only way," Peter sighed. "Anyhow, we'll try it, unless we can think of something better during the day. We'd better get down to breakfast now and start making excuses for the girls. It's going to be a dreadful sort of day to get through, anyhow."

And so it proved to be. The first shock was the Professor's greeting at breakfast. With a beaming smile he informed them that Mr. Arasim had left a note to say he had received a telephone call from his firm early that morning and that it was imperative he left at once.

"Quite a nice letter," the Professor said as he passed it across to Peter to read. "He seems sorry his boss, as he calls his employer, relies on him so much. Apparently he has learned a great deal from me and is grateful, as you see. I think you boys must have been mistaken about him, or else he was playing a joke on you all. This is not the letter of a man with a guilty secret in his heart. You note he intends to contact Miss Lavender regarding her kittens. Quite a thoughtful man. He does not intend she shall lose her extra little income."

"Very thoughtful," Peter agreed, feeling a little sick as he remembered so vividly Mr. Arasim's other note. "I wonder if we'll ever see him again?"

"I suppose so," the Professor said easily, "when he calls for the clothes and so on he has left behind, unless, of course, he writes and asks for them to be sent on to him. The girls are late, aren't they? Give them a call, Peter, please, or ring the gong again. They must have overslept."

"They haven't done that, sir," Peter said miserably. "They've . . . they're out."

It was fortunate that Franks brought in the letters at that moment, otherwise the Professor might have guessed something was wrong by Peter's tone. As it was he merely muttered:

"I hope they had something to eat *first!* Franks, pack extra lunch in the basket, please. I don't hold with all this rambling and so on without something in one's stomach!"

The prospect of having to face extra food at lunch-time was not inviting. Even Jack's appetite had faded with the strain of the worry he now felt for his sister and Ann. Yet the pretence had to be carried on for the benefit of the Professor and the protection of the girls, and the two boys dutifully went along to the kitchen some time after breakfast to help Adam with the truly weighty basket.

Franks looked sourly at them as they prepared to leave. Evidently he could contain himself no longer, for as they reached the door he spoke to them, his tone aggrieved.

"I understood the girls were to let me in on the fun this morning," he began, making a great pretence of clearing up the kitchen and not looking at them. "If anything happens to you children . . ."

"And something might," Peter said seriously. "Look here, Franks, there is a very good reason why the girls have not been down this morning. You'll be 'in' on things in time. In fact we shall depend on you and Uncle John. So far as we can make out it will be up to you two to save the day for all of us, but at the proper time. By the way, you always make Uncle John a malted drink the last thing at night, I believe?"

"That's right. He always has it after his bath. Says it helps him to relax and get to sleep. Why?"

"No reason why," Peter said mysteriously but wanting to make sure their note would be found later. "Just . . . don't forget to make it to-night whatever happens, will you?"

And having been assured by the mystified Franks he would not fail in his duty, the boys and Adam made off for the beach.

"We'd better spend the day where, if anyone's looking out of High Cliff House, they can see us," Jack suggested. "If they see we're bathing and behaving normally, then

they'll realize we are doing as they wanted and not trying to get help or rescue the girls. We've *got* to play their way until low water, anyhow."

"What time is low water?" Peter asked, waiting until Jack referred to the list he had made and still carried around with him.

"Twelve twenty-seven," Jack announced. "Hours away!"

Jack and Peter returned to Red House in time for supper and it seemed to the two boys that weeks not hours had passed before they could leave the Professor and go down to the basement. Peter felt wretched, as Professor Bradley had been so concerned when told Carol and Ann did not feel up to eating any tea or supper and would prefer to rest. The Professor had wanted to visit them, and both Peter and Jack had felt compelled to say the girls were asleep and that it would be better to leave them undisturbed until morning. They gave as an excuse the story that Carol and Ann had walked too far and were tired out, and that both girls had a headache from exposure to the hot sunshine all day. It was evident that the Professor was both hurt and puzzled, and after all his kindness to the foursome the boys did not enjoy deceiving him.

Once at the basement the task of writing a convincing note to the Professor was begun. It was very easy to be convincing, the trouble arose in writing the facts without giving the elderly scholar too great a shock. At last the boys decided to include a reminder copy of the second decoded note: "To-morrow night neap tide, main haul. Joel." pointing out that *to-morrow* had now arrived.

It was fairly easy then to write that Carol and Ann had been abducted and to include Arasim's note to indicate why the boys had been compelled to deceive the Professor. There only remained to add that Peter, Jack and Adam

proposed to scale the far side of High Cliff that night, timing their arrival outside the house with the time of low water. The plan was, they added, to allow ten minutes for whatever took place once the craft was lifted into the cellar, then go into action, relying on the Professor and Franks to bring reinforcements along in the nick of time.

"Make sure he doesn't start off too soon, Peter," Jack looked anxiously over his friend's shoulder as Peter penned his name. "If he came with the law in full force goodness knows what might happen to the girls . . . we've *got* to make this split-second timing! Joel and Arasim must think everything is all right up to the very last second, then we'll pounce! It's our only chance."

"I think both Uncle John and Franks will see that when they read Arasim's note," Peter said, folding the paper carefully. "Come along. It will take us ages to climb that cliff in the dark and in silence."

At five minutes to ten Adam appeared in the boys' bedroom and announced he was ready. Soberly and quietly the three of them crept from the house, conscious of the Professor still working away in his study and of Franks in his own room, probably peacefully reading the paper and knowing nothing of what lay ahead.

They had allowed half an hour for the journey to the base of the cliff. They were all three fully aware that Doctor Joel would not trust them and would, in all probability, be scanning through his glasses from his look-out on the veranda. In addition, whenever he could spare them, it was reasonable to suppose he would send out his two men from time to time to act as spies.

Adam led. It was the best way, the boys had decided, since he knew every inch of the countryside and cliffs and also as he appeared as well able to see in the dark as any

one of Miss Lavender's cats. They kept close together, not daring to use their torches, and, as neither Peter nor Jack could see half so well as Adam, their knees and hands were covered with scratches and minute cuts long before they commenced the actual scaling of the cliff.

To the boys, anxious about their sisters, anxious too that the criminals should be brought to order, the creeping and climbing seemed never ending. Adam alone appeared tireless, and although neither of the boys asked for a rest, he halted them twice, knowing they were unaccustomed to this kind of thing and would tire more easily than himself.

They were aching in every limb when, at long last, they found themselves on a flat plateau outside the walls which surrounded High Cliff House. They rested for a brief spell, then Adam first, Peter after a two minute interval and lastly Jack after a similar wait, they were over the wall and in the grounds surrounding the house itself. They were sheltered from observation from the house by a clump of gorse bushes. Not a comfortable hiding place, but they were fairly sure they could not be seen and in addition had a good view of High Cliff House themselves.

"Though what we hope to see," was Jack's comment in return to Peter's observation on this point, "I don't know. Everything that means anything takes place either in the bowels of the cliff or in the cellars of the house. There's nothing whatever to be seen from outside. We're just lying here doing no good at all so far as I can see."

"Wait!" Adam's whisper could scarcely be heard. "If men make what Doctor Joel call getaway then must have something to get away in! We watch and see. That much we should observe. Then we stop them getting!"

"Sound idea, if it works," Jack conceded. "O.K. We'll wait."

They waited until they were stiff, but dared not move. Jack's luminous watch showed ten minutes to twelve before there was any sign of anything unusual at the house. Their first observation of anything out of the ordinary came from Adam who suddenly stiffened, head alert, cautioning them to an extra silence. Jack and Peter listened intently too, and in a few minutes caught the sound of a motor engine approaching the house. The huge gates at the far side of the grounds swung open as the big car drove through and up to the house itself. The engine was silenced, the car lights switched off. A man descended from the driver's seat and went into the house, treading very quietly. After that there was silence again.

"Twelve fifteen," Jack announced some time later. "I'm getting absolutely sick of this. If only we had some way of knowing whether that blighter wrote the truth or not and whether the girls are still all right! If nothing happens soon I vote we try and find out for ourselves."

"Something happen now!" Adam said. "Listen. Aeroplane man, he come. Adam think when he come then all start to move. Listen. Things begin now!"

Faintly, because they were so far away, but unmistakably now they were actually listening for the sound, their ears caught the throb of the aircraft engine. Instinctively the two boys tensed, expecting they knew not what, but feeling they were prepared for almost anything. Adam lay perfectly still, one hand clenched on the short turf before him. He knew the others shared his thoughts: were the girls still safe, and what, if anything, had the Professor and Franks done towards helping them at this critical last minute?



CHAPTER X

THE FUSE IS LIT

PROFESSOR John Bradley lay back in his bath and wiggled his toes in the warm, fragrant water. For many years he had solved his problems of the day by relaxing, as at present, in his nightly bath. He was thinking now of the four children who had come to stay with him for their holidays and wondering why the two girls had been absent all day.

"I don't like it," he told himself for at least the tenth time. "There's something wrong. I wonder if they are really ill. Jack and Peter seemed worried, and were trying to hide the fact from me. I could sense they were really upset, although I don't think they guessed I knew. I'll go up to them when I've had my bath," he decided suddenly. "After all, they are all in my charge, and if anything should happen to any of them I shall be responsible. And in addition I should blame myself for the rest of my life!"

Consoling himself with the thought that the sooner he was into his pyjamas and dressing-gown the sooner he could find out what was really wrong with Carol and Ann, he began to hum a cheerful if untuneful noise into which Franks's shout from outside the door of the bathroom burst unceremoniously.

"Professor Bradley! Sir! Hurry up! Come out!" shouted Franks. "The girls . . . Miss Ann and Miss Carol . . . they've been abducted! The boys have gone after them. It's all here, in the tin of malted milk food!"

The Professor opened the bathroom door as Franks uttered the last few words. He could not imagine what on earth the tin of malted milk food had to do with whatever had happened to the girls, but he did not waste time in asking questions. He held out his hand for the paper which Franks had brought with him, and although not a word the man had said made sense to the Professor, he felt this paper might contain a possible clue and settled himself to read it to the end before commenting.

"Good gracious me! Then the children were right about Mr. Arasim after all!" he ejaculated as he read Peter's note. There was much here he could not grasp at the moment, but there was no hesitation in either his words or his actions as he attempted to sum up the story which lay behind the brief note. "Get the car, Franks," he ordered. "Pack a first-aid kit, and a stimulant. Take some rugs and fill all the hot-water bottles you can find. We may have to deal with injuries or shock. And whatever you do, don't show a light, either from the house or from the car. We may be watched, by what Peter has written here."

"Yes, sir. At once, Professor!"

Franks hurried away to carry out the Professor's orders, marvelling to himself at the manner in which the elderly

scholar had taken command of the situation. Within twenty minutes the orders had been carried out to the letter, and with the lights of the car switched off, Franks and the Professor started down the drive.

"We'll go to the coastguards' hut first, Franks," the Professor decided. "It will be up to them whether or not we should contact the Revenue men. Be careful. We are disobeying the law ourselves in driving without lights, but we dare not risk these men guessing we are on their trail."

They found Sam Saunders on duty, and his jovial face lit up with a beaming smile as the Professor descended from the car and came into the hut.

"Come inside and welcome, sir," Sam invited. "Something gone wrong with the car? It's not like you to be out so late unless you're stranded."

"Thanks, Sam." The Professor closed the door before going into explanations. "I am not in trouble or stranded," he said, "but my young people will be in serious trouble unless we can do something to help them. Will you please read this?" and he handed over Peter's letter and enclosures.

Sam read them carefully through and handed them back with a troubled expression on his usually sunny face.

"This is really serious, sir," he began. "I do not wish to alarm you further, but these people belong to a dangerous, well-organized international gang of crooks. We were warned they were operating along this coast, but they've been clever all right! They must have their lights screened to exactly their angle, so that unless one was right out to sea nothing can be seen. They've spread this story of the ghost-boat to scare local craft off, and everything else had been just as well thought out. I'll just get through to the Revenue Officer and to John Briggson.

He'll accompany you. One of us must remain on duty, and that's my job this turn."

"I'll leave all arrangements with you," the Professor told him, "but you see what it says there. The danger time is low water. The girls will be . . . hurt in some way if it is known help is on the way."

"We'll get them out of it, sir, don't you worry!" Sam assured him with far more confidence than he felt. "Just you wait here. Maybe you'll be allowed to go with the Revenue men. They'll want to see your letter."

The Professor lit his pipe and mustered what patience he could until, in a remarkably short space of time he and Franks were seated in the large car driven by one of the Revenue men, the Professor's less powerful car being left by Sam's hut. Half-way along the road leading up to High Cliff House the car was driven into the shelter of a tiny lane, lights out and engine silenced. The Professor glanced at his watch. It was exactly fifteen minutes to midnight and, like the boys and Adam on the cliff-top, the Professor felt he would never live through the necessary time before low water.

At ten minutes to twelve they saw the huge car go by, but to the Professor's surprise the officers made no move to follow it. Assuring himself they would know better than he, the Professor reasoned they must be waiting until whatever haul Doctor Joel was expecting had been received, knowing the crooks must have the diamonds in their possession before the officers could act.

"Then they'll pounce!" he thought with satisfaction, but the satisfaction was short-lived as he wondered anew if the two girls were still alive and well.

Carol and Ann, in the meantime, were also growing worried. There had been signs of activity in and about the house for some time, and they too had heard the

arrival of the car and driver. A few minutes after he had been shown in to Doctor Joel, Mr. Arasim came into the room where the girls waited, a long coil of thin rope in his hands, and an unpleasant smile on his swarthy face.

"I sincerely regret," he began smoothly, "the necessity for this simple precaution, but we do not know how seriously your two brothers have regarded the note I left for them. For your sakes I hope they realize that we mean business, but . . . we must make quite certain!"

"You're not going to tie *me* up!" Carol, like her brother Jack, was inclined to rebel, even when there was small chance of the rebellion doing any good. "I won't let you!"

"I'm afraid," Mr. Arasim said slowly, still with that unpleasant smile on his face, "you will have little choice, my dear! Laki!" he raised his voice sharply and the man appeared at a run: "Hold the other one while I fasten this little vixen securely. She wants to fight!"

It was in vain that Ann called out to her friend not to be foolish and not to risk being hurt more than was necessary. Carol fought with all her strength, but wiry as she was, she was no match for Mr. Arasim. Gradually her struggles grew weaker but none the less determined, until Ann felt suddenly sick as she heard Carol's sharp cry of pain as Mr. Arasim cruelly forced the girl's arms behind her. He tied her wrists together with a viciousness he might not have used had Carol not resisted so desperately.

Ann tried hard to remember what Peter had taught her when it was her turn to be secured. She offered no resistance, since it was obviously foolish to do so, but flexed her muscles so that the bonds were as tight as Mr. Arasim could make them, but she knew that once she released the tension she would have a certain amount of

"play" of movement, although whether or not she would be able to make use of it she had no means of knowing.

"Doctor Joel says they've to go in the cellar," Laki said abruptly.

Mr. Arasim looked surprised and seemed about to protest, but Laki merely shrugged and said, "the stuff's planted there, see?" Arasim nodded as though in confirmation. Obviously he had thought better of whatever it was he had been about to say. Without a word he hustled the girls before him towards the steps leading below the house itself.

The cellar was exactly as Adam had described it, and despite their dreadful position the girls looked about them with interest. Mr. Arasim thrust them before him, pushing them down on to a pile of old rugs and sacks which lay in one corner, not so far from the gaping black hole of the shaft described by Peter and Adam.

"You shall have a first-class view," Mr. Arasim said with nasty emphasis. "If you survive it will not matter, for we shall be miles away—over the sea—before your friends have time to do anything. If you do *not* survive, then it will not matter either, and no one will see you again to learn what it was you saw."

Neither girl spoke. Carol was very white from the pain in her arms, but she would not deign to look at Mr. Arasim. Ann longed with all her heart to comfort her friend, but words would not help them now. Mr. Arasim talked a little while longer, baiting them about curious people whose inquisitive tendencies often led them astray. Then, as footsteps sounded on the steps, he moved off to the other side of the cellar. The newcomer was Doctor Joel. He stood in the cellar entrance, his glance resting first on Ann and then on Carol at whom he reprovably shook his head.

"I am sorry to see you so uncomfortable, my dears," he said calmly, "but believe me it was a very necessary precaution so far as we are concerned. If only your boat had not been wrecked, or your funny little friend had not been so curious, none of this would have been necessary. As it is, you see this wire?" He indicated a thin, snake-like thing which wound its way across the floor to a spot about a foot from where the girls had been left. "It goes to the top of the steps. It is a fuse wire. Where it terminates, close to your two selves, is enough explosive—yes—just beneath that package, Miss Whatever your name is—to send High Cliff House into the air and to shake these cellars so violently that the shaft itself will be destroyed. What will happen to you? Who knows?"

He paused for a moment, but neither Carol nor Ann replied and he continued.

"The fuse will be lit . . . at the head of the steps . . . if your brothers attempt a rescue. Until the last moment I shall personally mount guard there, with my revolver at the ready. Don't worry," he added. "I think they are sensible boys and will realize when they are beaten. My spies have seen nothing of them, and if there is no sign of them before we leave, then the fuse will remain unlit. If we *do* see or hear them, then," he made a gesture of disintegration, "again . . . I regret . . . but I shall do what I have planned to do, if I am forced into such an action. Now you must excuse me. I have work to do. The time is ripe for the last of my tests. Oh, by the way," he turned as he stood at the bottom of the steps: "if it should be necessary for us to light the fuse you will have plenty of time to repent the inquisitiveness which led you into this. But not, I am afraid, the time to rectify your error!"

He smiled grimly and added as he once more turned to go.

"The fuse is a three minute one. That will give my men time to get away. There will also be time, if they are here and so compel us to this action, for you to call your brothers and your funny little friend to your aid. In that way we should be rid of you all. You have only fifteen minutes or so to wait now."

Neither girl spoke until Mr. Arasim looked at his watch, glanced at his chief and nodded. Carol could not keep silent.

"Synchronize your watches, gentlemen," she called in a shrill voice. "That's what my cousin says they say when planes are going out on a raid."

Doctor Joel ignored her, as though oblivious to any word she had uttered. Ann tried to hush her friend, but Mr. Arasim crossed over to them and glared down at Carol.

"One more word from you," he said as Doctor Joel disappeared up the steps, "and I'll not wait to be rid of you!"

Before Carol could defy him further a low-toned gong sounded through the house and Mr. Arasim, with one last look of hatred, crossed to the edge of the shaft. He stood as near as he could, looking down into the darkness of the shaft itself.

In spite of their dreadful predicament the girls were fascinated by what happened after that. Arasim remained, listening intently, and at the end of fifteen minutes or so they saw the curious underwater lift rise from the shaft, a model craft aboard. The mechanism stopped as though by magic and Mr. Arasim lifted the craft from its cradle.

Laki came running from the other cellar with an armful of cat-baskets. The girls were indignant as they saw the baskets already contained some of Miss Lavender's

precious kittens, although as Ann later admitted, the little creatures looked happy enough and well cared for, and neither man handled them roughly.

The craft was smashed to pieces in a few seconds, and Laki hurried away with the pieces of light wood, returning for the bits of machinery as Mr. Arasim transferred the contents of the little leather pouches to those in the linings of the cat-baskets. Both men worked quietly and without speaking a word. There was something uncanny in their silence. Now and then the girls caught the bright gleam of the diamonds as they slipped through Arasim's fingers, but the gleam in the eyes of the man himself was just as bright, Ann thought, and a thousand times more evil.

"All set?" Arasim asked as Laki returned after a trip from the cellar.

"Everything ready," said the other. "Doctor Joel has blown the fuses in the veranda. Sletsome has the transmitter. The machinery is all packed. The baskets are on their way to the car. There is nothing else?"

"Nothing. You may go now and join the others. I will follow in a few moments."

Mr. Arasim stood over the two girls. His face was twisted with hatred as he glared at Carol.

"Doctor Joel is very humane," he remarked. "I wish he had left me to stand at the head of the steps! He will arrange for your people to find you, if we get away unscathed. If we don't, he has told you partly what will happen. I will tell you the rest. There is a time fuse fixed in the shaft itself. At high tide this cellar, shaft and all traces of what you have seen will disappear for ever. I only hope he entrusts me with the task of letting your people know to remove you before that time! I am afraid he would discover that, regretfully, I have a bad memory! Good night . . . and happy dreams!"

He went quickly from the cellar and they heard his footsteps die away with a sense of relief, in spite of the fact that danger now threatened in no uncertain manner. It was at that point, as Carol afterwards observed, that several things began to happen at once, although at the time the girls were unaware of anything outside the cellar.

From their sheltered position the boys and Adam had more idea than anyone else of what was happening, with the single exception of one Revenue officer who had crawled stealthily to the house in the wake of the big car. Discovering the gates locked automatically once the car was through, the officer had scaled the wall, lying flat on the top and signalling by hand to his fellow officers, the Professor and Franks, who had followed, just as soon as the aircraft had first sounded over the sea. Now they were grouped close to the gate, outside the grounds and hidden by the wall.

From High Cliff House itself a procession came and went. Really there were only the two servants, Laki and Sletsome, the driver of the car and, later, Mr. Arasim, but each made several journeys.

"When Adam say 'go'," that worthy whispered, "you boys take house. Whatever happens, get Miss Ann and Miss Carol. Adam take car. Adam not let them make getaway if he can help it. Adam try make them delay until help arrive."

"We'll do our best," the boys said, "but . . ."

The gates, operated as they learned later by a switch inside the house, began to swing open again. There was no time to lose, no time to object or to make new plans. The driver took his place at the wheel and the engine throbbed into life.

"Now," whispered Adam. "Now . . . Adam say . . go!"

It was only as the figure of Doctor Joel appeared on

the steps of the house that Adam realized he had spoken that split second too soon. Doctor Joel took one quick glance at the two boys running towards the house, then turned and hurried back. At the top of the steps leading to the cellar he paused for a second, and the boys, running hard, saw the brief flame from the lighter he held in his hand. They heard his raised voice as he called:

"Shout for help, girls! Here come your brothers! I hope you all land in the same place!"

As the boys raced towards him he doubled on his tracks and ran through a corridor to the veranda. Now was Jack's chance to show what he could do, and he was hot on his heels, his running training standing him in good stead. Peter approached the cellar at a run, but warning shouts from the girls halted his headlong rush down the steps and he looked down with horror at the fizzing, glowing coil at his feet.

"It's a three minute fuse!" Carol's voice rose above the clamour from outside. "It's burning like mad. You can't stop it, Peter. Run! Never mind us."

Peter ignored her and raced down the steps. He stamped on the wire furiously, but this was quite ineffective. He estimated the fuse was burning at the rate of a foot a second, far too quickly for mental comfort. There was only one chance. Thankful now for what Ann termed his "pocketful of junk," he found his penknife and began to saw desperately at the wire. With the sound of the feet of the Revenue officers pounding overhead, Peter finally got through. The fuse was severed, the girls were safe. A few quick strokes of his knife and the girls were free of their bonds, free to follow Peter up the steps and into the confusion of the night.



CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE AT HIGH CLIFF HOUSE

ADAM was angry with himself. Too late he realized he should have made quite certain everyone, the doctor included, was in the car before he took action. Now there was nothing he could do but follow the plan they had agreed upon. The dreadful thing, so far as Adam was concerned, was that it meant his leaving the two boys to face the most dangerous man of the gang, Doctor Joel himself.

The car was moving slowly. Evidently the driver expected the doctor to jump aboard. With a wicked grin on his ugly face, Adam decided someone else would do just as well as the doctor, that someone being himself! The driver must have decided he would have to pick up the doctor later, for the car suddenly put on speed. Adam raced forward, gathered himself and sprang. He landed exactly where he had intended to land, on the running

board of the car at the driver's side, where the window was down, the driver's elbow protruding over the edge. From the back of the car Arasim strove desperately to strike Adam with the butt of his gun, but all in vain.

Exerting every inch of his long reach, Adam groped for the driver's throat. He found it, his fingers closed in a firm grip and he held on tightly while the car swerved violently from side to side, eventually it crashed into the wall, completely missing the gateway, just as Adam had intended it should do. The only difference in plan and action was that Adam had not intended to find himself trapped between the car and the wall, as he was now, a ready victim for the maddened Arasim.

The imposter-student had already managed to get in a number of blows on the head and shoulders of the defenceless Adam, when the Revenue men went into action. Franks too, arms whirling, temper at boiling point, entered the fray. The crooks were desperate, and for the unarmed officers and Franks the most dangerous person was Arasim, whose gun could be seen occasionally, gleaming in the dim light, as he strove desperately for the chance to put it to some use.

Suddenly Professor Bradley acted. What impulse had prompted him to pick up the packet of pepper Franks had used when making curry for dinner that evening he never knew. Perhaps it was simply a slight return of his old absent-mindedness, caused by the worry of the events of the past few hours. Whatever the reason he had for putting it in his pocket, he knew now how to use it! Like a flash he flung the contents of the packet into Arasim's face, temporarily blinding the man.

Arasim yelled with pain, dropping his gun and holding his hands to his face. That single action of the Professor's had definitely turned the tide of battle in the favour of

law and order! It was true, as the officers teased the elderly scholar later, that all concerned received a small share, but Arasim, at whose head the Professor had directed his aim, had received the bulk, as was intended. With the driver of the car still half unconscious as a result of Adam's iron grip on his throat, it was a matter of seconds before the entire group were securely held.

"The boys!" Adam gasped as Franks and the Professor released him from his trapped position. "In house! Went to rescue girls."

Arasim began to laugh, despite the pain in his eyes and the bout of sneezing from which he had not yet recovered. He shouted defiantly that they would see an enormous "firework" any time now, and that the children would be part of the display. It was Laki who sobered his friend and confederate.

"Doctor Joel is in there too," he said grimly. "He went back to light the fuse. I expected him to be at the gates, but he's not here. He will be blown up too."

Adam did not wait to hear any more. Hurt as he was, he started off for the house, Franks and two of the officers doing their best to keep pace with him. They ran down to the cellar, Adam leading, where the severed fuse afforded enormous relief, but there was no sign of the foursome, only the cut pieces of rope which had been used to bind the girls' arms. As they stared around them, wondering what was their best course, Peter and the girls appeared at the top of the steps, panting and breathless, demanding to know if Adam had seen Jack and if he was safe.

"Not seen him," Adam grunted, bounding up the steps and taking the lead, having a certain amount of knowledge of the plan of the house. The others followed closely at his heels.

Adam had a good memory, and he had been through the house on two occasions. He started off at a steady trot which took him to the veranda where, just as he had expected, he found Doctor Joel trying to force Jack over the edge of the veranda to certain death on the rocky cliffside below. It was a case of Jack's youthful agility against the man's superior weight and experience. The struggle was very uneven, but so far Jack had, apparently, held his own, although he was beginning to flag a little now. So intense was the battle that neither contestant heard their approach.

Peter and the girls, the officers too, would have rushed pell-mell to Jack's rescue, but Adam, for whom the officers were rapidly acquiring a healthy respect, stayed their headlong rush with a wave of his hand.

"You get Jack," he whispered to Peter. "Adam get man."

Peter nodded, instinctively realizing Adam's plan, since he knew Adam so well. As Adam signalled, Peter leapt forward to save Jack from falling backwards and over the edge, as Adam flung himself on Doctor Joel. The attack was a complete surprise, and there was no necessity for anyone else to interfere. Adam had not wasted his time in attending the ju-jutsu classes! Although the struggle lasted a little longer than Adam had intended, owing to the blows Arasim had rained upon him, in a very short time Doctor Joel was on the floor, his face contorted in agony as Adam knelt in triumph on the chest of their enemy.

"And that makes the lot, I take it?" The Revenue officer watched his men lead a sullen Doctor Joel away, snapped his notebook shut and turned to shake them all by the hand. "A nasty gang, if ever I saw one! It's just as well we took a warrant out at once. I'll see you

children later, and you too, my man!" he added to Adam. "There's sure to be a reward for you all. And now let's get out of here. If, as you tell me, there's a second fuse in the shaft which is timed for high tide, the area must be cleared and all shipping warned. We shall have to work fast."

A very happy party grouped around the table in the dining-room of Red House. The Revenue men, with the exception of those on duty, the coastguards, the Professor, Adam, the foursome and even an embarrassed Franks, were awaiting the rumble and roar which would tell them that High Cliff had fallen. The Revenue men and the coastguards had worked hard and fast. All shipping had been warned, the area cleared in good time. Their foreign counterparts had been radioed regarding the private aeroplane and not half an hour ago they had received the message that this remaining member of the gang had also been rounded up and there was hope now that a regular clean-up of this gang could be accomplished. Now it merely remained to witness the final act of destruction.

"There she goes!" Jack exclaimed as a sound like distant thunder caught their ears. "I will say this for old Hair-Oil and his pals, they're dead on time."

"So should we have been . . . dead, I mean," Carol shuddered, "if you all had not come to the rescue."

"What I still fail to understand," remarked the Professor, "is how all this has been arranged. Can you explain it?" he asked the officer in charge.

"I'll try, Professor. It should not be too difficult to explain. The first thing to remember is that the cave in which you," he smiled at Peter, "saw the strange craft disappear, was once an ordinary cave. That is, the sea lapped inside it, but did not cover the entrance. That was

centuries ago, of course. Landslides from the cliffs from time to time, subsidence of the sea floor, all manner of natural events over the years led up to the fact that the face of High Cliff, as we know it, is never free from water."

"So far as we know, sir!" Jack put in with a grin. "I should say Doctor Joel's fireworks of a few minutes ago might have made yet another change."

"I should say that is extremely likely," the officer agreed. "We will investigate later. To continue. This organization had been well thought out. If, as we shall know in due course, Doctor Joel was the man behind it all, he had a clever brain which he could have used to better purpose. As you must have guessed, the diamonds have been sent over by a private plane, which circled just outside the three mile limit on nights when the neap tides, lowest at new moon and full moon, were due. The channel would be absolutely full of water at high tide, and so, perhaps, not so much use. I will explain that point later."

"How did these people know of the cave in the first place?" the Professor asked. "I didn't . . ."

"It's old local history," the officer said easily. "There are several such, up and down the coast. Generations ago it was used by the 'yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum' type of smuggler, then, as I said earlier, nature interfered."

"Go on, sir!" Peter urged. "This is exciting. What next?"

"You were the one who followed the thing underwater, I believe?" The officer's eyes twinkled as Peter nodded. "Jolly good show," he went on. "Well, the craft was made of balsa wood. We know all this, incidentally, because my technical staff have pulled to pieces the one model remaining, which the gang were carrying away in the car. The light you saw and assumed—as we

all did—was at the tip of the mast, was really an encased light placed about half-way down the mast. The two thin, tapering masts carried an aerial, and the encased craft, completely watertight, carried a powerful battery, driving the propeller, the light and the receiving set.”

“Wonderful!” breathed the Professor in sincere admiration.

“The man on the veranda, the brains of the whole affair, who calls himself Doctor Joel, controlled the craft by radio impulse—you understand that means by transmitter and receiver?—from the moment it hit the water until the craft submerged. At that point, as soon as the aerial was completely submerged, changes were affected in the inner mechanism, so that the craft became controlled by an automatic control, very similar to the one acting on an aeroplane when ‘set’ to fly by automatic pilot.”

“The thing they call ‘George,’ sir?” Jack asked.

“Correct.” The officer nodded and continued. “When the craft, now controlled by ‘George,’ had gone so far into the cavern, it began to surface. It hit a spring-loaded pad which ran the full width of the cave, or so we assume from what you, Peter, told us and what our own technical knowledge tells us must be so.”

“Efficient!” murmured the Professor.

“Very,” the officer agreed. “To continue. This set in motion the electrically-operated lift which took the craft to the cellar under the house, and the rest was simple. The balsa wood craft was broken open, the pieces destroyed in the furnaces which heat High Cliff House. The mechanical parts were separated and sent abroad to a fictitious model club to be used again on another trip. The diamonds were placed in the cat-baskets, a useful bit of luck for the gang, since when Arasim came here it was

in order to find a safe means of delivery and he had one handed to him, as it were, almost at once. Then the diamonds were taken to certain shady dealers we have been watching for some time."

"The dreadful part of it all so far as I am concerned," Ann said quietly when the murmurs of amazement and admiration of the clever deduction had died away, "is that poor Miss Lavender will be so upset. She will just have to rely on what few kittens she can sell to Fairwater, and that will not be many once the holiday season is ended, but at least she will be sure the kittens will be all right and not going to such wicked men."

"The pet store, strangely enough, is genuine," the officer told them. "The owners are as startled to discover to what use the cat-baskets had been put before they received them as the good Professor here was to learn the true character of Arasim. The sale of the kittens can go on," he smiled, "so long as Miss Lavender wishes. And now," he nodded to his men and rose to leave, "we have work to do on this case, beginning with an inspection of what has happened to High Cliff during the explosion. If you will excuse us, sir . . ."

He turned to the children as the Professor nodded and rose to accompany his guests to the door.

"You will remember this adventure all your lives," he said quietly, "and rightly so. Without you that gang may have gone on for months undetected. No doubt the authorities will send each of you some tangible reminder of their gratitude in due course, but on their behalf I would like to say here and now, thank you all very much indeed for a splendid and courageous job of work well done. You are a brave group of children, and you have a brave friend." He glanced at Adam as he spoke. "I am very proud to know you."

He shook hands all round then, one hand on the door-knob as he was about to leave, he added:

"I am most heartily thankful you are all safe and well. None the worse for an adventure which might have ended disastrously. If there is anything we or the coastguards can do to contribute to your further enjoyment during the remainder of your holidays, please let us know and we will be delighted to help. Good-bye!" and he was gone.

"Well," Jack grinned at the others, "I feel a bit silly being thanked like that! What do you say to our taking the *Adventurer* out and looking at what remains of High Cliff from the sea?"

"Jolly good idea," Peter agreed, "but I must say it was decent of the old boy to be so pleased about our safety. After all, he and his men were in danger too. It's been very thrilling, but I'm glad it's over. They weren't exactly a gang to play with."

"And so say all of us," the others chanted, and laughing and shouting they ran out of the house and down to the beach, secure in the knowledge they would be free to come and go unmolested to the end of the holiday.

